

The Buddhist Perspective of Life and the Idea of Human Rights

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Introduction: How Buddhism Is Relevant to Human Rights

BUDDHISM was established by Sakyamuni Buddha who lived and taught around the 5th century BCE in India. At that time, India was in a state of turmoil with continuous wars and conflicts in which smaller states were taken over by larger states. The constant warfare was the very reason for Sakyamuni Buddha's departure to seek his own enlightenment and to learn how peace and coexistence on the earth could be realized.

Through asceticism and meditative practice, Sakyamuni Buddha deepened his insight and was able to see "the Inner Cosmos" common to all people. Thus he became "the Enlightened One" by realizing "the fundamental cosmic Law (Dharma)," which was the source of the existence of every sentient being. He then began guiding people to realize their own "fundamental cosmic Law," as well, and directing them to the path of peaceful coexistence in the world, the path which overcomes wars and violations of human rights, through transforming their own "Inner Cosmos."

In the West, the modern idea of human rights was established based on the idea of the Natural Law. Historically, the idea of human rights has developed from the first stratum of the right of freedom, to the second stratum of social rights, and to the third stratum which designates the right of solidarity.

The third stratum includes the rights of peace, of development, and of a healthy and sustainable environment. It is through the development of the human rights movements that everyone on the globe can jointly work together to build a harmonious world which concentrates on creating a means for "peace," "development," and "environment."

A starting point of Buddhism was the Buddha's wish for peace and coexistence in the world. Having the Buddha's realization as the source, the Buddhists in the Orient have been developing the bodhisattva path, the means by which all people can be saved and enlightened.

Paying attention to the common desire in the West and the Orient for human rights, it is essential to attempt to relate the Buddhist approach for humanity to the struggles for human rights in the modern West, which has been developing the third stratum of human rights. How is Buddhism relevant to today's human right movements, and what role can it play in realizing global peace and coexistence?

When considering the mutual relationship between Buddhism and the human right movements, there are two dimensions to discuss: the first dimension is how to lay the foundation of the concept of "human rights" and the second is how to discuss the bodhisattva path practiced by the Buddhists as a human rights movement. The former discussion should be a philosophical inquiry and the latter the practical exploration of the bodhisattva path. This paper will examine these two aspects respectively.

1. The Philosophical Foundation of Human Rights: Concerning Article One in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

To inquire into the philosophical foundation of human rights means to examine the fundamental questions, such as "Why are human beings born free?" or "Why are humans inherently equal?" In other words, it is an inquiry about the foundation of human dignity and of the respect paid to all humans.

How to lay a philosophical foundation for the concept of human rights was the very focus of the dialogue between Mr. Athayde, then President of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, and Dr. Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International, in *A Dialogue of Human Rights for the Twenty-First Century*. This issue was discussed in great detail by Mr. Athayde who, as a representative of Brazil, participated in the "Committee Three" of the Commission on Human Rights in the UN, which stipulated the draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The following is the citation from the dialogue, in which Mr. Athayde describes the discussion that took place among the members of Committee Three.

ATHAYDE: Article One of the Human Rights Committee draft began, 'All human beings are born free and are born equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' I objected to this. To guarantee respect for the rights we were setting forth, we needed a statement closer than this to the feelings of all peoples. The language should

be less abstract. ... Article One should encourage us to act in a brotherly way because God created us in his image and endowed us with conscience and reason.

IKEDA: You interpret humanity in terms of an image—from Latin *imago*—that is a universal, indestructible entity transcending time and space. The draft version of the preamble speaks of innate endowments, thus suggesting that conscience and reason start at birth and are limited in terms of time and space. You perceived that this is not true and that reason and conscience are common to all humanity and are universal in both time and space.¹

Mr. Athayde, in the dialogue, also mentioned the Committee Three's examinations of the foundation of human rights, in which they traced the history of human rights beginning with the Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1700 BCE). During the committee's discussion, the participants freely shared their opinions based on their own beliefs, including the thoughts of Eastern traditions such as Buddhism, that of Christianity which was a basis of the Western tradition, and that of Islam based on the *Qur'an*. In the end, Mr. Athayde withdrew his proposed revision because he was convinced that the original intention of his proposal, that is, the idea that human rights originate in something universal and not from physical birth, was fully accomplished. In this episode, it is critical to pay attention to the point concerning Article One, in that the Committee Three discussed the fundamental issue of how to lay the foundation for the understanding that human rights are a fundamental essence of being human.

In general, the thought of the fundamental nature of human rights, which states that all humans are born free and equal, is considered to have been established by the idea of the Natural Law which emerged during the Enlightenment era of the 18th century. This concept of the Natural Law was a result of the attempt to move from the standpoint of medieval theology from God's perspective to the perspective of viewing human life from man's perspective. Along with this stream, the thought that the humanity is born free and equal rose as a counterpart to the political absolutism during the pre-modern time.

This current of thought brought about the Declaration of Independence in the United States of America and the Virginia Bill of Rights in 1776, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen during the French Revolution in 1789.

On the other hand, another stream of thought is represented by

Jacques Maritain and Levi Carneiro, which attempts to lay a foundation for human rights on the basis of the Creation of the Universe by God. Yasuhiko Saito states that Jacques Maritain's claim is the most suitable when discussing the foundation of the universality of human rights and the universal deference to the concept of rights, and summarizes the perspective as follows:

While the humanism that was established during and after the Renaissance and the Reformation is considered humanity-centered, the humanism that is centered on God is called "an integrated humanism of solidarity." ... Vladimir Solovyov, who is as equally respected as Maritain, stated that the nature of the integrated humanism of solidarity is "In order to make a change on earth, it is essential that the force of change should not be of the earth." As he said, it is critical to have a metaphysics that is beyond the humanism centering on humanity in order to establish the new social order for human rights and for respecting humanity.²

Furthermore, Saito describes the meaning of life:

In fact, human beings participate in the process of the Creation with their own free will. In taking full responsibility of their choice to choose good and to avoid evil, and to choose the just and to reject the unjust, they join in the process. In other words, the meaning of life exists in the noble mission that participates in God's grand project to create the universe through humanity's act to realize truth, goodness, and justice in the earth. ... When we say the equality of all human beings, it means that all are equal in front of God with regard to this mission³.

He states that all human beings are equal in front of God in terms of the mission to join His project of Creation. Further, being different from other kinds of creatures, humans have the ability of ethical judgment and can choose goodness and justice, and carry out their mission with their own free will. In this perspective, free will and ethical choice are the basis of humanity's inherent equality and freedom. Mr. Athayde's revision proposal was based on this very position of God-centered humanism, a proposal that stated that the idea of "All human beings are born free and born equal" was not good enough. It should be revised to say: "God created us in his image and endowed us with conscience and reason." As this statement shows, Christian humanism, while claiming it is humanity-centered in terms of their ethical ability and awareness of

their own mission, in fact, seeks its basis on the idea of a transcendent God.

However, Mr. Athayde in the dialogue with Ikeda, also, expresses his interest in and support of Buddhist humanism. Saito, too, delineates that he believes that giving meaning to the idea of human rights could be made sufficiently by other schools of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and other great religious traditions, as well as Marxism and atheism⁴.

How does Buddhist humanism lay the foundation for human rights? Buddhism does not have an absolute transcendent God as Christianity does. Hideo Mineshima poses a question: “Buddhism that does not have God as the Absolute can be said to be literally humanistic and humanity-centered. What type of structure does Buddhism encompass in regard to the relationship with something transcendent in order for humanity to be truly human and for humanism to be truly humanism?”⁵ Mineshima then states a position of “the immanent transcendence” in Buddhism, as opposed to “the transcendent immanence” in Christianity.

“It can be seen that Buddha’s enlightenment and his action to save the people indicate transcendence in a specific meaning. The legend says: Sakyamuni Buddha, through meditation under the bodhi-tree, attained the realization of the Dharma, that is, the truth that penetrates both the universe and humans. Then, he went to Deer Park to preach the truth. At that moment, the five monks who saw the Buddha cast themselves at his feet. This veneration by the five monks was not just for Sakyamuni as a person, but was veneration for the Buddha who was an embodiment of the Dharma, while he was still a human being. Through his meditation, Sakyamuni Buddha had gained the standing of transcendence while keeping his human appearance.”⁶

According to this statement, it is possible to perceive that, in the context of Buddhist humanism, true humanism is established when exhibiting the transcendental dimension that goes beyond human norms in reality and then, acting to transform reality.

2. The Buddhist Perspective of Life: The Structure of Internal Existence and Transcendence

In Buddhism, the meditative practice initiated by Sakyamuni Buddha lays the basis for the foundation of human rights. It can be explained by the structures of “internal existence” and “transcendence” that are mani-

festated through the discernment of the “Inner Cosmos” existing within a human life. We can discuss this point from two aspects: (i) Sakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, and (ii) the development in the Lotus Sutra, which is relevant to the idea of human rights.

(I) Sakyamuni Buddha’s Enlightenment

Sakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment unfolded in the deepest point of his meditative practice. The meditative practice that starts from an outer stratum of consciousness is an exploration toward finding and unfolding the “Inner Cosmos.”

The process of this “introspection,” that is, to deepen from the outer stratum into the depths of consciousness, initiates with illuminating one’s own past deeds, which are called “*karma*” in Buddhist terminology. Then, the process unfolds beyond individual karma into the “shared *karma*” in the transpersonal realm, which is the *karma* shared among family members and friends. Further, the process reaches into the dimension that is shared with the community, one’s ethnicity, and the state. In this realm, the depth of consciousness shared by each community or ethnicity, and the nation-state in contemporary times, too, fuses each to the other. In the deepest dimension, the consciousness of all human beings fuses on the base layer of the ecological system.

Sakyamuni Buddha’s meditation went through the profound depths of the collective consciousness of humanity, and through the numerous differences of race, ethnicity, gender, or occupation, he sought out the shared horizon of the universal and fundamental equality among all human beings. Sakyamuni Buddha, at the same time, perceived “the arrow of earthy desire” piercing the depth of everyone’s consciousness, an arrow that drives people to conflicts and wars. “The arrow of earthy desire” is the symbolic cause that leads the people to discriminate against each other, prevents recognition of the equality of others, and compels people into fights.

“Then, I saw a barb, hard to see, nestling in the heart.”⁷

“Affected by this barb, one runs in all directions. Having pulled that barb out, one does not run, nor sink.”⁸ (*Sutta Nipāta*)

Dr. Ikeda sees a fundamental human evil in “the arrow of earthy desire,” and indicates the path for humanity’s peaceful co-existence through overcoming it.

“The ‘invisible arrow’ of evil is not to be found in the existence of races

and classes external to ourselves, but is embedded in our own hearts. The conquest of our own prejudicial thinking, of our own attachment to difference, is the necessary pre-condition for open dialogue.”⁹

This claim makes the control over our prejudicial thinking, that is, our “attachment to difference” found in multiple dimensions of family, ethnicity, the nation-state, and humanity, the necessary condition in order to establish universal human rights. That is, through overcoming the “fundamental ignorance” of prejudicial thinking existing in the depths of our consciousness, the basis for the human rights is established in the dimension of humanity’s life itself. This is also an indication of the fundamental nature of equality.

How was Sakyamuni Buddha able to overcome the “attachment to difference,” and to pull out “the arrow of earthy desire”?

The meditative practice of Sakyamuni Buddha allowed him to be unaffected by “the arrow of earthy desire” that struck “the smaller self.” His brilliant wisdom cultivated through the meditative practice illuminates the contour of his inner cosmos and was integrated with the realm that is fused with the ecosystem of the planet, a stratum beyond a layer of the collective consciousness of humanity. Sakyamuni Buddha discerned the arrow of earthy desire, which is the prejudicial thinking, or arrogance, pierced throughout humanity, and by removing the arrow and by breaking through even the dimension of the vicissitude of planets and, further, of stellar systems, he “introspected” to the deepest stratum of meditative states in order to integrate himself with the universe itself, or with the cosmic life. In other words, through his meditation he developed his “introspection” into the ultimate state of “Inner Cosmos” that is shared by all humanity, in which he sought the base of universal “equality.” By doing so, he finally became an Enlightened One who broke through the fundamental darkness at the very moment when realizing “something eternal” or “the fundamental Law (Dharma)” within the deepest of his life strata, the strata that penetrated the cosmic life itself.

The moment of Sakyamuni Buddha’s experience of realization was delineated in the poem of the *Udāna*.

“When things become manifest
To the ardent meditating Brahman,
He abides scattering Mara’s host
Like the sun illuminating the sky.”¹⁰

This “Dharma” is itself the great state of life that scatters all earthy

desires and fundamental ignorance, and that illuminates them as does the Sun giving light in the sky. This “Law (Dharma)” became the basis of Mahayana Buddhism as “*Tathāgata* (Thus Comes One)” and has been developed as the teachings of “Buddha nature” and “*Tathāgata-garbha* (womb of *Tathāgata*)” that are the foundation of all people’s enlightenment.

Right before his death, Sakyamuni Buddha left these words in the *Mahā-parinibbāna suttanta*,

“Be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge.”¹¹

Among Buddhists, this passage is well known by terms such as “island of self” and “island of Dharma.” The “self” here refers to one that is fused with “Law (Dharma),” and that manifests as “transcendence” that exists “within.” This is not the “smaller self” that “the arrow of earthy desire” pierced, which Sakyamuni Buddha rejected and overcame. That is, the “Self” as a refuge of one’s own self is one that manifests from the state that is integrated with the fundamental Law of the universe.

The “Self,” which breaks through the earthy desire of multiple dimensions, which rejects “the smaller self,” and which ultimately manifests as one that is integrated with the fundamental Law of the universe, is itself the “true Self” or “the Great Self,” the one that is the ideal in Buddhism. The “Self” possesses spontaneous free will to discard the internal “arrow of earthy desire” while breaking through the external restraints.

It is the fundamental “freeness” that is inseparable from the dimension of “transcendence.” Through the Buddhist perspective of life, this “freeness” is the basis that activates the universal “rights of freedom.” At the same time, this active “Self” encompasses the “equality” shared not only with all of humanity, but also with all types of sentient beings because it has the fundamental wisdom that discerns and discards “the arrow of earthy desire” piercing the Inner Cosmos of all humanity. In other words, the “Self” is the wisdom that perceives the fundamental equality, and that forms the foundation which supports the universal “rights of equality” from the perspective of life.

Therefore, in his *Sutta Nipāta*, Sakyamuni Buddha expresses the ideal appearances of the phenomenal realm that is illuminated by the wisdom of the fundamental “equality,”

“This (difference) is not found individually among men in respect to

their own bodies, but among men difference is spoken of as a matter of designation.”¹²

“Not by birth does one become a Brahman; not by birth does one become a non-brahman. By action one becomes a Brahman; by action one becomes a non-brahman.”¹³

“Thus the wise, seeing conditional origination, knowing the fruit of action, see this action as it really is.”¹⁴

Sakyamuni Buddha, by claiming the wisdom of the fundamental “equality,” the wisdom of *pratītya-samutpāda* (interdependence) in Buddhist terminology, denies a caste system and advocates the equal existence of all humanity. This breaks through the earthy desire of “the attachment to difference” among lineage, tribe, occupation, gender, culture, and religion. By doing so, then, Sakyamuni Buddha asks actions (karma), in other words, the way to live, of every single human being as a critical signifier.

That is, by making an inquiry, he encourages both himself and all people to live the true way of life as human beings, a life that manifests fundamental “freeness” and “equality.” By following his contemporary Indian social norms, Sakyamuni Buddha expresses the ideal figure with the term “*Brahman*,” a term that signifies the “Self (Great Self)” which is integrated with the cosmic life, and which encompasses the fundamental “compassionateness” that encourages all the people to actualize “freedom” and “equality.” From the Buddhist perspective of life, this fundamental “compassionateness” encompassed in the “Self” is also the foundation that assures the universality of the “rights of solidarity” and supports the actualization of the rights of peace, environment, and development. The foundation of these qualities takes root as the fundamental Law of the universe that appears from the “realm of transcendence.”

Sakyamuni Buddha expresses this fundamental “compassionateness” as follows:

“Whichever are seen or unseen, whichever live far or near, whether they already exist or are going to be, let all creatures be happy-minded.”¹⁵

“And loving-kindness towards all the world. One should cultivate an unbounded mind, above and below and across, without obstruction, without enmity, without rivalry”¹⁶

This activation of the fundamental “compassionateness” is, needless to say, beyond the temporal and spatial limitation in the phenomenal realm; that is, spatially speaking, it reaches the people who are not in his

sight and encompasses beings in the entire globe, and temporally speaking, all of humanity from the timeless past through the future are included in the horizon of his vision.

Sakyamuni Buddha, by activating his spontaneous “free-will,” which is encompassed in the fundamental Law of the universe, and by illuminating the phenomenal world by his wisdom that sees the universal equality, gave his immeasurable energy of compassion for sentient beings to the people in his contemporary East India and cultivated the path of life to save all of them. Buddhism, therefore, is the religion of the “wisdom” that illuminates the fundamental concept of “free-will” and equality, and its activity in the real world is the practice of “compassion” to save all people.

(II) Application of the Lotus Sutra

The Lotus Sutra reveals the Sakyamuni Buddha’s life of enlightenment, that is, the series of steps in the process of “introspection” towards the “Inner Cosmos,” the integration with the transcendence at the moment of realization, and the “manifestation” of the “fundamental Law of the universe” into the phenomenal world. This process is symbolically enacted in the Lotus Sutra as the transformation of the locus of the three assemblies where the Sakyamuni Buddha preached his teachings, which are “the First Assembly on Eagle Peak (Mt. Grdhra-kuta),” through “the Ceremony in the Air,” to “the Second Assembly on the Eagle Peak.”

The teaching, from the first chapter, “Introduction,” to the tenth chapter, “The Teacher of the Law,” is set on Eagle Peak. Eagle Peak signifies the phenomenal realm, and Sakyamuni Buddha demonstrates the internal existence of the state of Buddhahood, or the Buddha nature within each sentient being of the nine worlds. In other words, the teachings of the First Assembly on Eagle Peak show the process of the introspection to the “Inner Cosmos” existing in all people through Sakyamuni Buddha’s instruction. In the second chapter, “Expedient Means,” Sakyamuni Buddha expounds that “The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone,”¹⁷ and indicates “the reason” is to have “Buddha’s wisdom” being manifested within the life of each sentient being.¹⁸

These passages show the fundamental equality of all beings, and, after teaching them, Sakyamuni Buddha reaches into the inner realms of all people’s lives to break through their prejudicial mindset, their unreasoning emphasis on and attachment to differences. He breaks through their prejudice, their beliefs that those who are in the two vehicles (*sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*), those who committed evil deeds, or

those who are women are not able to attain Buddhahood, and he then preaches the attainment of the two vehicles, for evil doers and for women. The basis of his conviction is itself the Buddha nature, that is, the fundamental equality innate in all sentient beings including those who were thought to be unable to attain Buddhahood. This principle of fundamental equality is applicable beyond the differences of race, gender, culture, lineage, occupation, and physical or mental conditions. Nevertheless, the inherence of the Buddha nature, the state of Buddhahood, is nothing but principle in the context of the First Assembly on Eagle Peak. It does not mean that the Buddha nature within humans has been realized in the phenomenal realm.

In order to actualize the Buddha nature, the state of Buddhahood, it is essential to experience “the Ceremony in the Air.” Eagle Peak is the phenomenal realm that is conditioned by the temporal and spatial framework. In order to manifest the Buddha nature in the phenomenal realm, one ultimately has to go through the realm of transcendence by breaking through the phenomenal realm as Sakyamuni Buddha did when he gained attainment under the bodhi-tree.

The Ceremony in the Air signifies the realm of “transcendence,” which is beyond the temporal and spatial framework. The beginning of the eleventh chapter, “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower,” in the Lotus Sutra describes an enormous “treasure tower” that erupts from the earth and stays in the air. From this point, the Ceremony in the Air is set forth.¹⁹

The earth means the phenomenal realm. The expression of the tower’s “staying in the air” demonstrates the direction that transcends Eagle Peak, symbolizing transforming the phenomenal into the air, a pictorial representation of transcendence. The enormous “Treasure Tower” epitomizes the “fundamental Law of the universe,” that is, the Buddha nature, which is inherently shared by all sentient beings in their “Inner Cosmos.”

The teaching then continues to the “three-time purification of the lands,” the “gathering of the emanation Buddhas from the ten directions,” and the “two Buddhas, who are Sakyamuni and Many Treasures Buddha, who are sitting side by side.” The teaching goes on to the Buddha’s supernatural power that raises all members of the assembly into the air, which indicates the initial point of the Ceremony in the Air. This ceremony lasts through the fifteenth chapter, “Emerging from the Earth,” in which a group of bodhisattvas called the Bodhisattva of the Earth appears, the sixteenth chapter, “The Life Span of the Thus Come One,” in which expounds the Buddha with Eternal Life, up through the

twenty-second chapter, “Entrustment.” The meanings of what is described during the Ceremony in the Air are as follows:

- 1) To raise the assembly into the air means that the phenomenal realm has been broken through and that the members of the assembly have entered into the realm of “transcendence.”
- 2) The “three-time purification of the lands” and the “gathering of the emanation Buddhas from the ten directions” signify the cosmic-sized spatial expansion, as well as the aggregation, that is, at one hand, the expansion of Sakyamuni Buddha’s life, the state of Buddhahood that spread to the universe as the emanation bodies, and, on the other hand, their returning back to Sakyamuni Buddha himself.
- 3) The appearance of the Many Treasures Buddha, who is said to have come from the Eastern Pure Jewel World, signifies that Sakyamuni Buddha’s teachings are relevant to the Truth (Law) in the past as “East” symbolizes the past. Also the following twenty-first chapter on “Supernatural Powers,” expounds the entrustment of the Bodhisattva Superior Practice, who appeared in the chapter “Emerging from the Earth,” to the future time, which means that the Truth will be substantiated in the future. This demonstrates temporal expansion of the fundamental Law of the universe, which Sakyamuni Buddha realized, to the past and the future. At the same time, it represents the temporal aggregation into the very moment of the present. Thus, it shows the principle that “a moment” is itself “eternity.”
- 4) The “two Buddhas sitting side by side” and “the encompassment” of the assembly into “the Air” signify an expression of the state of “the Air,” which is beyond time and space. This is the illustration that all beings in the ten worlds, along with every single phenomenon in the universe, are encompassed in the realm of “transcendence,” that is, in the Fundamental Law of the Universe.
- 5) The sixteenth chapter, “The Life Span of the Thus Come One,” reveals the Buddha to be an eternal presence, that is, the Eternal Buddha. Through revealing who “Sakyamuni Buddha” is, the “Eternal Sakyamuni Buddha” and “the Buddha of Eternity” are discerned.²⁰ Later in the chapter, there is a depiction of how Sakyamuni Buddha attained his realization of the eternal past, and of why his future existence will be twice longer than his past life span, which essentially signifies his eternal future life span.

“The Eternal Buddha” is identical with “the Eternal Law,” which is the Fundamental Law of the Universe. And, the realm of “Transcendence” represented by “the Ceremony in the Air” is the locus of the Cosmic Life, a space that encompasses lives of all beings and phenome-

na, and from which all beings and phenomena emerge. The Buddha in the locus of the Cosmic Life itself is “The Eternal Buddha,” that is, “Sakyamuni Buddha of Eternal Presence.” Thus, “the Eternal Buddha,” integrated with the fundamental “equality” that is a quality of the locus of the Cosmic Life, possesses fundamental “freeness” that is lively, permeating, and vibrantly throbbing into the entire sphere of the universe.

This fundamental “freeness” is expounded as “True Self,” that is “an island of Dharma (Law)” and “an island of Self” to his disciple, Ananda, in the *Mahā-parinibbāna* suttanta by Sakyamuni Buddha who was born in India. This is a formation of the “Greater Self” that is unified with the “Eternal Law” and freely throbs without being affected by earthy desires. This “Eternal Buddha” who possesses both fundamental “equality” and “freeness” simultaneously possesses ultimate “compassionate-ness.” On the locus of the Cosmic Life as his base, his unrestricted activity as the “Eternal Buddha” engages with the compassionate practice to save sentient beings. In other words, “the Eternal Buddha” is “the Eternal Buddha for Saving.” In order to actualize his act to save sentient beings in the nine worlds of the phenomenal realm, he has to reveal himself in the phenomenal realm. That is, he has to again return himself into the phenomenal realm after residing in the “transcendence.” The place of the assembly comes back again to Eagle Peak. What is different from the previous first assembly on Eagle Peak is that the compassionate activities by the “Eternal Buddha for Saving” are expressed as the various bodhisattvas’ engagements to the people.

The Second Assembly on Eagle Peak lasts from the twenty-third chapter, “Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva of Medicine king,” to the twenty-eighth chapter, “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.” In the second assembly, although it is the same phenomenal realm, the innate Buddha nature is no longer a theory as it was in the first assembly. Because it went through the Ceremony in the Air and the revival from the locus of the Cosmic Life, which is the realm of transcendence, the Eternal Buddha for Saving activates its concrete compassionate practices that lead the transformation of the phenomenal world. These types of humanistic activities that transform the phenomenal world are called the bodhisattva path.

3. Bodhisattvas’ Images and Human Rights

The teaching of Christianity declares equality among humans in terms of their mission to participate in God’s project to create the universe. On the other hand, Buddhism teaches that human beings possess “funda-

mental equality” in terms of their mission to join the bodhisattva path by their free-will based on “the fundamental freeness,” a path that is a manifestation of “the fundamental compassionateness” of the universe that is also an unfolding of “the Eternal Law” of the universe. In other words, with regard to their mission to pursue the bodhisattva path, humanity is inherently equal beyond the differences of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, occupation, or social status.

(I) The Eternal Buddha and the Bodhisattvas of the Earth

The Mahayana Buddhist texts describe various bodhisattvas who each carry out their own missions. Relating to the Lotus Sutra, among them are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who appear in the Ceremony in the Air (the fifteenth chapter, “Emerging from the Earth”). They manifest from the basis of the fundamental “freeness” in order to comprehensively accomplish the mission of the “Eternal Buddha” to save all sentient beings. They are also considered to be “the messengers of the Buddha” who, being entrusted with “the Buddha’s task,” save sentient beings after Sakyamuni Buddha’s death.

Nichiren, in his *Records of the Orally Transmitted Teaching*, discusses the four representatives of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who are the Bodhisattvas of Superior Practices, of Boundless Practices, of Pure Practices, and of Firmly Established Practices, as corresponding with the four virtues: eternity, happiness, true self, and purity, based on the *Supplement to The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*.²¹

These four virtues signify that the “Self (Greater Self)” of the Bodhisattva of Superior Practices integrates with “the Eternal Buddha” and it functions to carry out his Cosmic Mission by his own free will. The virtue of purity of the Bodhisattva of Pure Practices reveals the function embodying the fundamental compassionateness by breaking through its own evil mind (earthly desire) and transforming it into a good mind, that is, enlightenment. The compassionate function to save people, also, indicates the virtue of eternity, the quality of the function of the Bodhisattva of Boundless Practices that overcomes every obstacle without limit. It is also a manifestation of “freeness” practiced by the Bodhisattva of Superior Practices. Through the act of saving people freely, the greater state in “establishing the mind” is built up. This is the virtue of happiness that is signified as “Firmly Established Practices.” This is an expression of the fundamental “equality,” a state of happiness that every individual is able to obtain.

(II) Various Bodhisattvas Appearing in the Lotus Sutra

Comparing the functions of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth mentioned above, which are comprehensive and universal, the bodhisattvas and Buddhas who appear in the Second Assembly on Eagle Peak, as well as the other Mahayana texts, signify individual functions that support the Eternal Buddha's work from each of their own individual positions. Thus, each Buddha and bodhisattva takes his or her own individual vows respectively. In this section, we shall examine the content of the individual vows that were made by the bodhisattvas of the Second Assembly on Eagle Peak from a contemporary perspective.

Before doing so, however, it is essential to categorize the contemporary thought of human rights into three classifications. The first group, the so-called "Human Rights in the First Generation," is about civil rights and political rights, which are the rights of freedom from the nation-state and are listed in the second to the twenty-first articles in the Declaration of Universal Human Rights. The second group, "Human Rights in the Second Generation," is about the social and cultural rights listed from the twenty-second through twenty-seventh articles in the Declaration. They are the rights that are requests towards the nation-state. Today, the third group, "Human Rights in the Third Generation," has been advocated; they are, for example, the rights for peace, for development, and for a healthy and sustainable environment.

Concerning "respect to humanity" as the keynote of human rights, Mr. Shigejirō Tabata describes this as follows:

"The essential human rights originated from the thought of the Natural Law during the Enlightenment era, and continued being developed through "The Declaration of Independence" in the U.S.A. and "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens" in the French Revolution. Concerning human rights in the third generation through the perspective of the history of human rights, I believe that their essential basis is their respect for humanity. On the basis of the respect for humanity, we are able to discuss issues such as peace, development, and the environment. What is essential is to respect the humanity of all people."²²

The base of human rights is laid on the points to pay respect to humanity, to fulfill basic needs for their lives, and to encourage humanity to flourish for not only material but also for spiritual fulfillment. When considered with "Human Rights in the Third Generation," they are no longer contained within the framework of the nation-states, but are to be

realized through cooperation and solidarity among international agencies, the NGO, and the United Nations, among others. Although human rights in the third generation are the rights to be realized through solidarity, the agent itself is nothing but “each individual.”

Keeping these facts as a background, we would like to discuss the contemporary significance of the “vows” that are made by the individual bodhisattvas respectively in the Second Assembly on Eagle Peak.

(i) Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

The vow made by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and his actions are an exemplar of the way of bodhisattvas in Buddhism. An episode of this bodhisattva is described in the twentieth chapter, “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging,” which, in a certain era when arrogant monks enjoyed great influence, one bodhisattva called Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appeared and began worshipping every individual whom he encountered in order to display his respect for all humans.²³

He, in fact, paid respect to “the Buddha nature” that innately exists within each individual despite their arrogance or animosity in their external appearances. This episode shows his actions to respect the nature of “humanity” as brilliant “Buddha nature” existing within those who would be the future Buddhas, and his aspiration to enlighten them. By means of his aspiration, he devoted himself to non-violent actions as “a sole act of worship” to others. “The Fundamental Cosmic Life” that all individuals inherently possess as “Buddha nature,” is only revealed by means of non-violence and good will. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, expressed the cosmic existence as “Truth (*satya*)” and advocated “Non-Violence (*ahimsa*)” as a means to embody the ideal. “The Path toward Peace,” which the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and Mahatma Gandhi showed, is the only path to actualize the “rights of peace,” to achieve “freedom from violence” in a community with solidarity, and to enable the realization of “human security.” In fact, all the struggles that various bodhisattvas display share the principle that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging exhibited, a principle that one pursues a blossoming humanity as “Buddha nature” and an expansion of actions of good will, such as non-violence.

(ii) The Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, The Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, and The Bodhisattva Monjusri

The Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, and the Bodhisattva Monjusri represent “the freedom of scholarship, thought, and artistic expression.” The Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound

appears in the twenty-fourth chapter, “The Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound,” in the Lotus Sutra. “Wonderful Sound” refers to beautiful music that is offered to the Buddha. It is said that this bodhisattva had offered the Buddha hundreds of thousands of different kinds of music. The sutra depicts that when this bodhisattva arrived in this world, “the instruments of hundreds and thousands of heavenly musicians sounded of themselves without having been struck.”²⁴ This is a symbolic representation of the rights of free artistic expressions, such as music.

The Bodhisattva Universal Worthy appears in the twenty-eighth chapter, “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy,” the last chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In the Chinese scripts of his name Puxian, *pu* refers to universality that means to permeate through the phenomenal realm, and *xian* a function of reason and intelligence that seeks theoretical ideals and pursues truth. This bodhisattva is considered to be, along with the Bodhisattva Monjusri, a leader of a group of bodhisattvas who followed a provisional Buddha. The Bodhisattva Monjusri, on the other hand, already appeared in the first chapter, “Introduction,” and plays an important role in the twelfth chapter, “Devadatta,” and the twenty-second chapter, “Entrustment.” As a Japanese saying “*Monju no chie*” expresses the “Wisdom of Monjusri (Monju),” this bodhisattva embodies *Prajna* (wisdom). While Bodhisattva Universal Worthy represents the theoretical virtue and the determined virtue, the Bodhisattva Monjusri signifies the virtue of wisdom and the attained virtue. In other words, the Bodhisattva Monjusri symbolizes the intuitive wisdom that is a religious and philosophical attainment, and the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy is the scholastic and rational intelligence. These two bodhisattvas represent the rights of “freedom of religion and thought” and “freedom of scholarship and rationality,” respectively.

(iii) The Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sound

The Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sound is a bodhisattva who listens to the people’s poignant voice and gives them the fearless state to fulfill their own wishes. Thus, he is also called the Provider of Fearlessness. The focus of his saving activities is “worldly benefit.” The list below exhibits his roles that represent “the rights of life, freedom, and physical safety,” “prohibition against inhumane and humiliating treatments, such as torture or punishments,” and “prohibition against arbitrary arrests, confinements, or expatriation.”²⁵

The list starts with the vow made by the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sound to secure the people’s physical safety from violence, natural disasters, or poisoning.

- 1) Even if one were surrounded by great fire, it can never burn the person, or if one were drifted by a great flood, the person would reach the shallows.—This vow shows the wish or desire for freedom from physical dangers and fear caused by natural disasters.
- 2) One can avoid the hardship given by *rakshasa* (demon beings) in the midst of the great ocean and no *rakshasa* or *yaksha* (one kind of nonhuman being) would ever be able to harm the person.—This vow signifies the right for physical security by avoiding the various kinds of societal violence, which is expressed by *rakshasa* and *yaksha*, and the right of obtaining “the freedom from violence.”
- 3) One can escape from hostile robbers in the major world system.—This is a claim for the right of freedom from social violence.
- 4) One who was about to be poisoned could escape from it, and, instead, the person who attempted to poison him would be poisoned as retribution.—This is “the freedom from murder by poisoning.”

Next two lines, being indications of the struggles with the states, are about persecutions from the states.

- 5) Even if one were facing persecution by the state and were about to be killed as a punishment, the sword would be broken down into several portions.—This vow signifies the right of freedom from torture or irrational punishments by the state authority.
- 6) Although if one were restrained by shackles, the person would be able to escape from them.—This is a claim for the rights of freedom from the authoritative state power.

(iv) The Bodhisattva Medicine King and The Buddha of Medicine Master

The vows made by the Bodhisattva Medicine King and the Buddha of Medicine Master are for “the rights to be saved from illness or poverty, and to secure the necessary level of life standards for oneself and one’s own family members’ health and well-being” and “the right to receive security from society.”

The Bodhisattva Medicine King became a bodhisattva when he, back then a rich man called a Millionaire of Constellation Light, made a vow to heal both physical and mental illness that afflicted all the future sentient beings.²⁶ This bodhisattva’s deeds are described in the twenty-third chapter, “Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King,” and he made a vow to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in the twenty-sixth

chapter, “*Dharani*.”

The Buddha of Medicine Master directly relates to illnesses of all sentient beings, and his vow to save the people from poverty and sickness was made in the “Twelve Great Vows.”²⁷ Among them are as follows:

- 1) I would like to save those who suffer hereditary disability, physical and mental illnesses. (The sixth vow)
- 2) I would like to alleviate circumstances that one suffers from illness and poverty when no medicine or physician is available. (The seventh vow)
- 3) I would like to save those who suffer starvation and commit evil deeds in order to obtain food. (The eleventh vow)
- 4) I would like to save those who have no clothes and suffer by cold or heat. (The twelfth vow)

The points above are the vows to save the people from sickness and poverty; that is, they are an advocacy for societal and economic rights.

Furthermore, as the fifth point, in his tenth vow, he made a vow to save those who are apprehended, confined in prison, or are facing flagellation or capital punishment by the state authority. This is a claim of the rights of freedom from the state authority.

These vows above, made by various Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the Lotus Sutra and other Mahayana texts, have inspired Buddhist followers and have become a beacon of the Bodhisattva Path.

The followers of Buddhism after Sakyamuni Buddha have deeply recognized that the path for peace and coexistence, which the Buddha indicated is the basis for “human rights” and “human security,” and they have been unfolding their human rights struggles following the peaceful, non-violent practices such as the Bodhisattva Path throughout the East Asian region. The struggles have been rolling out through the Northern route, that is, from India to China, the Korean Peninsula, through Japan, as well as through the Southern route from India to Sri Lanka through the entire South Asian region. Throughout history, countless numbers of Buddhists have accomplished their contributions toward peace, and the stream of their activities to seek peace continues into contemporary times.

Notes

¹ Austregésilo de Athayde and Daisaku Ikeda. 1995. *A Dialogue of Human Rights for the Twenty-First Century*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. pp. 44–45.

² Yasuhiko Saito. 1984. *Sekai jinken sengen to gendai (The Declaration of the Human Rights in the World and the Contemporary World)*. Tokyo: Yushindo kobunsha.

pp. 7–8.

³ Ibid. p. 8.

⁴ Ibid. p. 6.

⁵ Hideo Mineshima. 1991. “The Human Rights from the Buddhist Perspective.” *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 30–1: 110.

⁶ Ibid. p. 110–111.

⁷ *Sutta Nipāta*. v. 2. 1995. trans. by K.R. Norman. Oxford: Pali Text Society. p. 107

⁸ Ibid. p. 203.

⁹ Daisaku Ikeda. 1996. *A New Humanism*. New York: Weatherhill, Inc. p. 155.

¹⁰ Shiro Tamaki. 1997. *Bukkyo wo tsuranuku mono (That Which Penetrates Buddhism)*. Tokyo: Daizo shuppan. P. 42.

¹¹ *Mahā-parinibbāna suttanta*. 1995. Oxford: Pāli Text Society. P. 108.

¹² *Sutta Nipāta*. op. cit. p. 71.

¹³ Ibid. p. 73.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 73.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 17.

¹⁷ *The Lotus Sutra*. 1993. trans. by Burton Watson. p. 31.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 31.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 170.

²⁰ Ibid. pp. 225–226.

²¹ *The Records of the Orally Transmitted Teaching*. 2004. trans. by Burton Watson. p. 118.

²² Shigejirō Tabata. 1991. “Taidan: Daisan sedai no jinken to hatten no kenri (Dialogue: The Human Rights in the Third Generation and the rights of Development).” *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 30–1: 21.

²³ *The Lotus Sutra*. op. cit. pp. 267–268.

²⁴ *The Lotus Sutra*. op. cit. p. 293.

²⁵ *The Lotus Sutra*. op. cit. p. 295.

²⁶ *The Sutra of the Meditation of the Two Bodhisattvas of Medicine King and Superior Medicine*. *Taisho shinshu daizōkyō*. vol. 20, p. 665 a.

²⁷ *The Sutra of the Original Vows and Benefits by the Medicine Master Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Light*. *Taisho shinshu daizōkyō*. vol. 14, p. 405 a–b.