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I N D E X



Revival of the Global Environment and the Role of Buddhism

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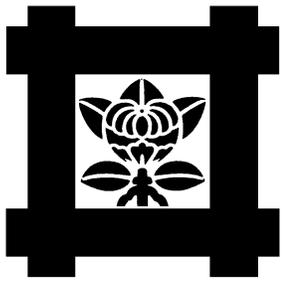


You will never be alienated from the Buddha

Rev. Ryusho Matsuda

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Revival of the Global Environment and the Role of Buddhism



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There was an international environmental conference in Kyoto, Japan in 1997. The original environmental meeting was held in Berlin, Germany in 1995, and was named “COP1” by reason of the theme of discussion of the Co2 issue. This conference was started in order to establish a treaty

for the prevention of global warming. The main purpose of the third conference held in Kyoto “COP3” was to set concrete numerical targets for the quantity of Co2 emissions, as a guideline for achieving the goal set between 2008 to 2012. Today, there are diverse environmental problems in the world, such as the destruction of wilderness and the ozone layer, acid rain and global warming.

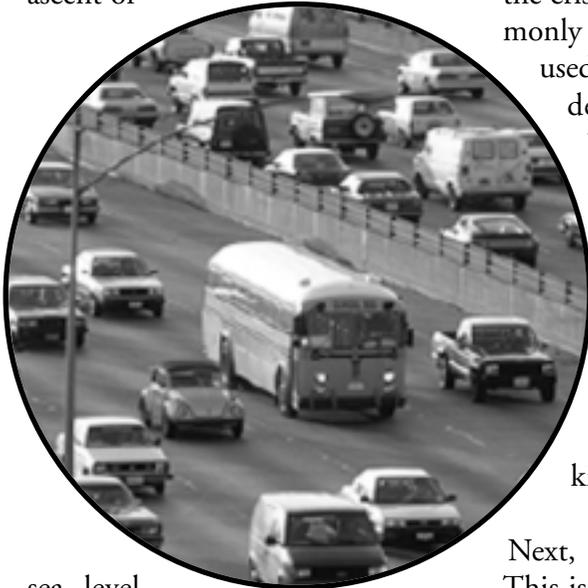
Co2 is the main cause of global warming. Of the whole quantity of carbon dioxide emissions, the United States emits 34 percent, and Japan emits 16 percent, so only two countries, the United States and Japan emit 50 percent of the amount. The quantity of Co2 emissions per person in a year is 5.1 tons in the States, 3.1 tons in Germany, 2.3 tons in Japan, 1.7 tons in France. France keeps a low quantity because of nuclear electric power generation. The United States especially emits a high quantity of Co2 because of military use. As is generally known, Co2 causes “Greenhouse effect,” and the temperature of the atmosphere and the ocean are raised by the greenhouse effect. Then, It causes abnormal weather and it could change the entire ecosystem on the earth.

Global warming caused by greenhouse effect is not only one serious problem, but also the destruction of the ozone layer is a grave issue. The ozone exists dispersively from 10 km up to 50 km above the ground. It actually is a 3 mm thin film if it is compressed in a condition of 1 atmospheric pressure. In short, roughly ten million or twenty million species on the ground are substantially protected by the 3

CO₂



mm ozone film. It is said that 3.5 billion years ago, creatures were born in the ocean, and the level of the sea rose and fell repeatedly every hundred thousand years between the ice age. The highest ascent of



sea level was from 80 m to 100 m, so once the rising sea level came down, creatures on the current land were exposed to the atmosphere, and they all died out because of no ozone layer. It is said that the formation of the ozone layer was completed 4 hundred million years ago. After the formation of the ozone layer, there were creatures that survived on the ground, and human beings were born 3 million years ago. Today, there are millions of land species including human beings that are protected by this ozone layer. The 3 mm thin ozone film is indicated as a unit of 300 du. However, its quantity has been reduced 3 to 5 percent. Today, the du is 285-290. This means that the thickness of the ozone layer has become thinner. It is said that the limit line is

250 du. If the quantity of ozone decreases below 250 du, our cells, DNA and chromosomes which control our genes start a mutation. If that happens, not only human beings, but all species could face the crisis of extinction. As is commonly known, freon or CFC used for cars and refrigerators destroys the ozone layer. Today, a new type of freon which does not ascend more than 10 km above the ground has been developed, but this is still an element which causes greenhouse effect, so the Kyoto conference decided on a prohibition against all kinds of freon.

Next, there is the acid rain issue. This is caused by sulfur (So₂.) As So₂ ascends into the air, it produces a chemical reaction, and becomes sulfur oxide. Then, sulfur oxide is accumulated 30 percent below the clouds, and it falls as acid rain. Of the quantity of sulfur emission, China emits the highest quantity of So₂, 20 - 30 million tons in a year, the United States emits 20 million tons, European countries emit 6 million tons, and Japan emits 0.4 million tons. Japan set devices which remove So₂ on thermal power generators, and contribute to the environment. However, even if Japan prevents the emission of So₂, China located next to Japan emits a lot of So₂, acid rain falls on Japan because of the prevailing westerlies. If the acid rain constantly falls, ducts will be damaged and lead or the ion of iron will enter into

human bodies through tap water. It could lead to cancer and softening of the brain. Thus, acid rain is exceedingly dangerous.

The destruction of the tropical rain forest rapidly continues. 20 million hectares of forest disappear each year. This extent is the same size of Japan except Hokkaido Island. It means that in every minute, forests the size of 10 baseball fields are destroyed. Three hundred million tons of oxygen is lost by the destruction of forest each year. A human being needs a ton of oxygen for his or her life in a year, therefore, we lose oxygen for three hundred million people. If the quantity of oxygen in the air keeps getting smaller, and the density of carbon dioxide goes up to 700 ppm, it is expected that sea level will rise 1 to 3 m due to global warming. If that happens, many southern Pacific Islands will be submerged.

As mentioned, I want you to know that we are facing grave environmental issues today. Then, why have these problems happened? I believe that the reason is the man-centered or anthropocentric ideas that we have. Humanism has become egoistic humanism somehow. In general, Western people or Christians believe that God creates human beings who resemble God, and he creates nature for human beings. Namely, the idea of Western people or Christianity toward nature is that first, there is God, then, second is human beings, and third is nature. Under this thought, human love of gain

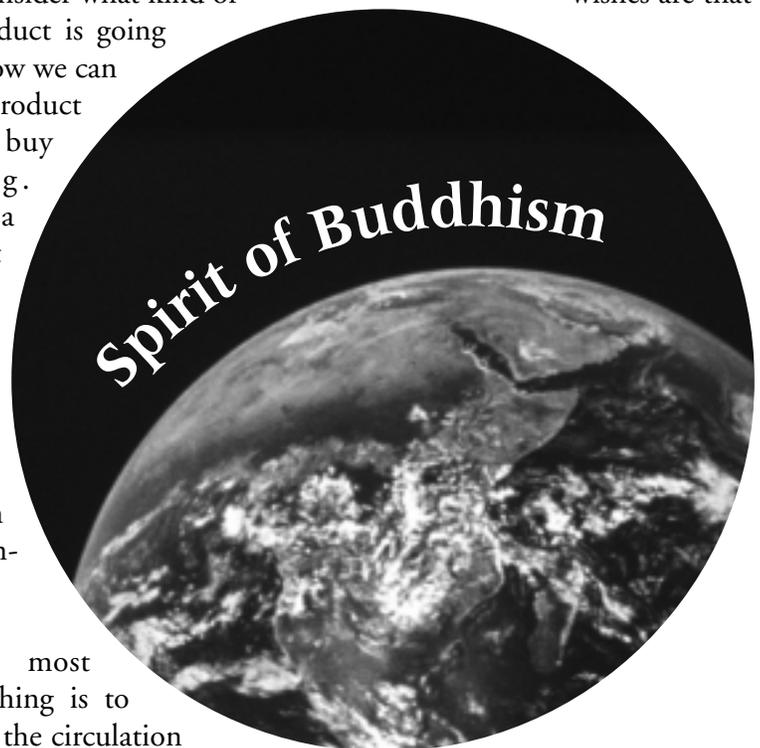
deepened, and the result was capitalism, modernism, and today's industrial society. In short, under the idea of monotheism, people have destroyed and changed our environment unconcernedly. I believe that this is the original cause of the environmental issues that we are facing.

On the other hand, the world view of Buddhism is that Buddhas, gods and human beings, and nature are in unison. Buddhism believes that there is Dharma -universal law-, and human beings and nature coexist within the Dharma. As there is a teaching that says "Mountains, rivers, grass, and trees, everything includes Buddha nature" in Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhism teaches that all things are equal because Buddha nature is embedded in everything. I think that coexisting with nature is to realize that we, human beings live in conjunction with the environment. In order to realize this truth, we need to know the circulation and mechanism of the environment. In other words, we should know the "reincarnation" of the environment. As living beings reincarnate, natural resources should have reincarnation. So far, human beings have focused on only consuming natural resources and human profits, but we have not considered that we have to return the byproducts of our consumption to our environment as wastes. The consequences of our acts are the pollution problems in the 70's, and today's global environmental issues. It is needless to say, we have to think about our

actions based on "cause and result" or "Karma." I strongly believe that from now on, all companies and we, the consuming public should consider the consistent process in which we think not only of the "artery" through which we take natural resources, but also the "vein" through which we return wastes to the environment in a state that nature can decompose. Besides, companies would better have a responsibility for their wastes to the end, and think of economic progress within the harmony with nature. The consuming public should not buy a product based on only their own convenience, price, and appearance, but consider what kind of waste a product is going to be and how we can recycle a product before we buy something. We do need a consistent policy in which we exclude all products which have a negative impact on the environment.

Thus, the most important thing is to think about the circulation and mechanism of the environment, and we should live based on not humanism, but the rule of nature. So, first, we have to realize the fact that we coexist with nature, and we live as a part of the

environment. I think that today, human beings need spiritual revival. In Nichiren Shu Buddhism, there is an important teaching "Itten Shikai Kaiki Myoho" meaning "All living beings, under the heaven within the four seas, embrace the wonderful Dharma." This teaching is also the final wish and goal of Nichiren Shonin. In my opinion, "Wonderful Dharma" refers to law of nature. Scientifically, "Wonderful Dharma" implies ecosystem or ecology. Namely, all living beings embrace ecology. I do strongly hope that all people set the "Spirit of Buddhism" in their minds for the future economy and civilization. Lastly, my dearest wishes are that



Nichiren Shu will play a central role in an environmental movement, spread the teaching of the Lotus Sutra globally, and show power in the 21st century.

You will never be alienated from the Buddha

Rev. Ryusho Matsuda

I am always thinking: "How shall I cause all living beings to enter into the unsurpassed Way and quickly become Buddhas?" - the Lotus Sutra Ch. 16

The Buddha was born as Prince Gautama Siddhartha to Queen Maya of Kapilavatsu in the Flower Garden of Lumbini in India. The legend states that as soon as the baby Buddha was born, he took seven steps, pointed his right hand to the sky and his left hand to the ground and said, "I am the only one who can save all beings between heaven and hell." At that time, it is said that sweet tea or rain fell from the heavens to celebrate the arrival of this great person who later became the founder of Buddhism. After he attained Buddhahood at the age of 35, Shakyamuni Buddha traveled all over northern India teaching people how to find true happiness until he passed away at the age of 80.

In the 2,500 years that have passed since then innumerable people world wide have accepted his teachings and experienced a joyful life of faith. These people have shared the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha with others. However, when we look around the world, we see that many people are still suffering.

Since the beginning of the 20th Century, science has developed marvelously. Through medical advances, human life has been prolonged.



Our lives have also been revolutionized within the past 30 years by computers and the internet. Compared to our parents generation, our lives are far more secure and luxurious. We seem to be living in a consumer paradise that would have been unimaginable in the time of the Buddha. However, in reality, many people still suffer from stress, loneliness, anxiety, and a pervading sense of meaninglessness. It seems strange that people have more complaints even as technological advances make our lives easier. Why?

In this modern age, so many people are alienated from the society, the world and nature. Sometimes, they are also alienated from their family and even themselves. They are frustrated, and ask themselves: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? Asking these questions indicates a healthy engagement with life. But many people have no time to ask these questions due to the hectic pace and many distractions of life today. Some people are too sick. Some others are too poor.

We can feel their pain and we can understand why they are suffering. But it is sad to see so

many people suffering from material greed, unreasonable anger, and ignorance of the true nature of reality even while in the midst of the material prosperity of this consumer oriented society. These three poisons, create more and more frustration mentally and spiritually. They alienate people from the world and even from themselves. Some may go so far as to exclaim, "I hate myself." Hegle, the great German philosopher of the 18th Century, said: he history of man was at the same time the history of man's alienation. Alienation means that man does not experience himself as the

acting agent in his experience of the world, instead other people and the natural world remain alien to him. In other words, when we are alienated from the world, we lose our sense of feeling and connection to the world and we become like automatons. We are unable to positively relate to anything. In the absence of positive feelings, the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance swiftly come in to fill the emotional void. These three poisons then create a further sense of separation and suffering which then leads to more frantic efforts to find happiness through consumerism. This misguided effort then causes more alienation which further aggravates the three poisons and in this way the vicious circle of suffering and even self-hatred is perpetuated.

If you go to a winery you can actually see how this alienation might arise in the face of the technological productivity of our consumer society. In the winery, you will see the marvelously efficient movement of wine bottles on conveyor belts. Only a few workers are needed to ensure the smooth operation of the winery. The process is a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, whose presence is almost superfluous. In such a setting, a worker may think, "I am a mere living appendage, and that is a cause for concern. In other words, the worker has just become nothing more than a machine part. Naturally, the worker is tired, bored, and disgusted because he must keep pace with the machines for many hours even though he is not a machine. Neither does he directly enjoy the fruit of his labor. He is not experiencing himself as actively engaged with the world but only as a passive component in a large machine. Naturally, he has no pride in his work, no love for what he does, and probably

no love for himself or anyone or anything else either in such a situation.

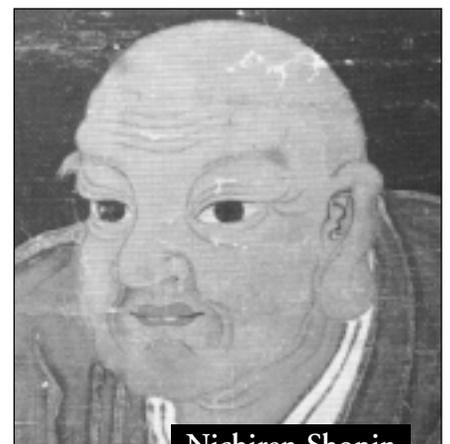
On the contrary, the workers feels alive only during their leisure time, whereas at work they feel lifeless. There is a feeling of misery rather than well-being, because they are unable to freely develop their mental and physical energies but are physically exhausted and mentally full of despair. The worker therefore only comes alive when they are able to live on their own terms after work during their leisure time. Many people, for instance, come alive when engaged in "do it yourself" projects on the weekends, such as writing computer software or building a back porch. This may involve planning, the use of tools, and even hard work. But when the project is completed there is a sense of accomplishment. This is because they were able to determine their own goals, set their own pace, directly engage the materials involved, and in the end enjoy the fruits of their own labor.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches that life does not need to be this way. Our alienation can be cured once when we stop trying to seek happiness through material gain or consumerism which virtually enslaves us to a machinelike system that was set up to provide for and perpetuate a lifestyle of consumption. But what kind of happiness is there besides material prosperity? What kind of life would heal the alienation that so many feel?

Nichiren himself provides us with a good example of someone who lived a life of meaningfulness and joy even though he had no access to the comforts we enjoy. Nichiren Shonin's life was full of constant persecutions and hardships, but he never felt alien-

ated from the Buddha or the world due to his strong will and compassion. He had great faith in the Lotus Sutra and the protection of the Buddha, and the hope of attaining Buddhahood. His life was the practice of his belief and the embodiment of his faith. Nichiren did not set his life to the rhythm of a machine, rather he based it upon the rhythm of the Odaimoku. By doing so, he never felt alienated from anything, he was cured of the three poisons, and he was able to engage the world in a way that was positive and uplifting for both himself and others.

This is why he earnestly taught us to have the same faith and hope in the sutra. He wished that all people could come to experience life as he did no matter what their circumstances were. Having a "strong spirit to overcome any hardship was his foundation throughout life. His strong spirit was grounded in his faith in the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha. By sharing that spirit of faith in the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha, we too can overcome our alienation, transcend the spiritual impoverishment of this consumer society, and discover the ultimate truth wherein we will escape the machine for the gardens of the pure land.



Nichiren Shonin