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Youth Crime and the Lotus Sutra

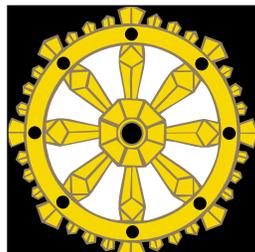
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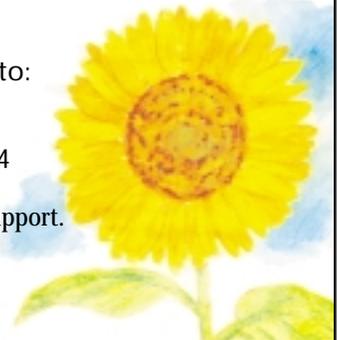
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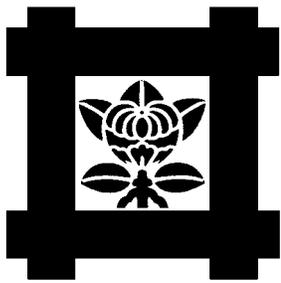
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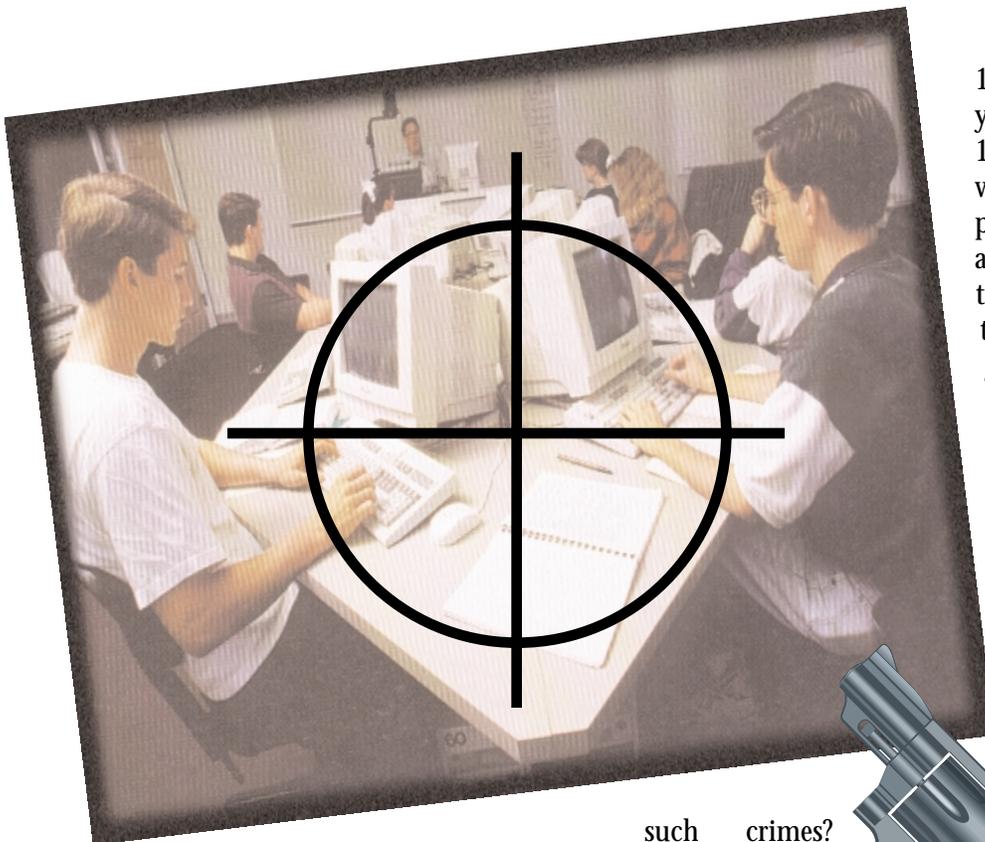
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Youth Crime and the Lotus Sutra



15,000 teenagers in the U.S. last year, 21% of high school boys and 15% of middle school boys took a weapon to school at least once in the past year. 60% of high school boys and 31% of middle school boys said they could get a gun if they wanted to. 75% of all boys and 60% of all girls said they had hit someone in the past 12 months because of anger. 43% of high school boys and 37% of middle school boys believed it was OK to hit or threaten a person who made them angry. In other words, more than one in three boys think it's OK to hit a person and three in four boys did it. About one in three high school boys said they could get a gun, and in fact more than one in five boys took gun to school. Now we can say school is more dangerous than we had ever expected. In fact, 39% of high school students and 36% of middle school students don't feel safe at school. Can you believe that?



Rev. Chishin Hirai
Assistant Minister,
Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Unfortunately, there are many crimes committed by juveniles recently. We hear of many incidents involving guns in the U.S. schools. In Japan there are many juvenile crimes committed with knives. Why do these youths commit

such crimes? Some say that they commit such crimes because of their short temper. Sometimes we do not know their motives. Their parents and guardians say that they are unable to understand them and do not know how to deal with them. What kind of situation are we in? Why is the situation getting worse? How should we sort out our problems?

According to a survey by Josephson Institute of Ethics of more than

we can say school is more dangerous than we had ever expected. In fact, 39% of high school students and 36% of middle school students don't feel safe at school. Can you believe that?

On April 20, 1999, two heavily armed boys entered Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, with the intent on killing students and destroying the building. Not only Colorado but also the whole

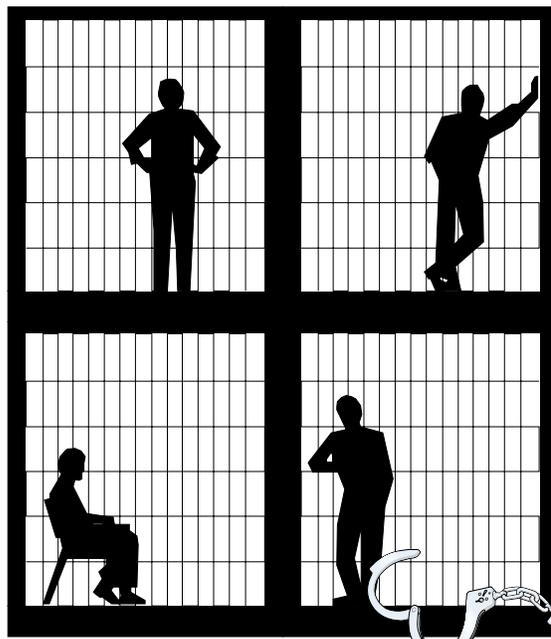
nation was in a state of shock over the school shooting that left 14 students and one teacher dead. They, 17 and 18-year-old boys enrolled in the school, were motivated by a desire for vengeance attributed to rejection they felt from popular student athletes. It ended in their suicide, leaving a stunned nation searching for an explanation for such a horrific act. It was a terrible tragedy, but you need to understand that it could happen anywhere in the U.S. when you look at that survey.

On the other hand, could it have happened if they didn't have any weapons? There were many weapons around them. That's why they could do so. If not, it might not have happened. Minors can't buy weapons at a certified dealer.

Parents or guardians have the responsibility to keep weapons away from their children. It is not strange that young people want to have and use weapons as they watch them on TV or movies. However, to think about it and to do it are quite different. If there were no weapons around them, all they could do would be to just think about it. Unfortunately, there were weapons around them. They had access to weapons. It is difficult for us to blame only young people for using weapons in such a situation. I don't want to criticize only young people. I don't want to rebuke the gun itself, either. It is more important to control the gun. Young people are immature not only physically but also mentally so it is difficult for them to be considerate

and polite like adults. It is difficult even for adults to be considerate and polite. I think that parents should always take half of the responsibility for whatever their children do.

By the way, there is a story in the Lotus Sutra, chapter IV: "Suppose there lived a man in a certain country. When he was a little boy, he ran away from his father. As time passed, he became poverty stricken.



He wandered about seeking food and clothing while his father was vainly looking for him ever since he left home. His father, very rich and possessing innumerable treasures, thought, 'I am old and decrepit. I have many treasures, but I have no one to inherit them. If only I could find my son and give him my treasures, I shall be happy and peaceful, and have nothing more to worry about.'

The son happened to walk towards his father's house. Standing by the gate of the house, he saw his father in the distance. Seeing the exceed-

ingly powerful man (his father), the poor son was frightened. He regretted that he had come there. He thought if he stayed there any longer, he would be forced to work so the poor son ran away. The rich man who was sitting on the lion-shaped seat, recognized the poor man at first sight as his son. He immediately dispatched a man standing beside him to quickly bring back the poor son. The messenger ran up to the poor son, caught him and took him by force. More and more frightened, the poor son fainted. Seeing all this in the distance, the father realized that his son was too base and mean to meet a noble man. The poor son was released. The father said to two men looking worn-out, powerless and virtueless, 'Go and gently tell the poor man that he will be employed here for a double day's pay. If he asks you what work he should do, tell him that he should clear excrement.' He dispatched his messengers secretly. Having found him, they told him what they had been ordered to say.

The poor man came back with them. He was glad to be treated kindly, but still thought that he was a humble employee. Therefore, the rich man had him clear excrement for twenty years until he (father) became seriously ill and knew that he would die soon.

He ordered his poor son to take custody of the storehouse of treasures. The poor son could not yet do away with the thought that he was base and mean, and stayed in his old lodging. After a while the father noticed that his son had become more at ease and peaceful, that he wanted to improve himself, and that he felt ashamed of the thought that

Lotus Sutra

法華經

he was base and mean. The time of death of the father drew near. The father told his son to call in his relatives, the king, ministers, and others. When they all assembled, he said to

them, 'Gentlemen, this is my son, my real son. He ran away from home and wandered facing hardships for more than fifty years. I happened to find him twenty years ago. This is my son. I am his father. All my treasures are his. He knows what has been taken in and what has been paid out.' The son was so surprised and thought, 'I was poor, base and mean. Now I have obtained the treasures and all other things from my father. I have never been so happy before.' "

I was very impressed by this story. Especially, the father is a great person who educated his son with patience. If I were he, instinctively I thought I would tell my son the truth at first and would live with him as father and son. Probably though, the son would not be able to adjust himself to a new life and would lose his mind. However, the father didn't do so and was patient with his son. The son was not just a child. The son was an adult of 50 years. The father made every effort to reach his goal. The son also worked hard. That's why they could reach their goal.

It is said that the father was the Buddha and the son was us later.

The father who led the insecure son with expedience is just like the Buddha.

The son, who didn't know who the real father was, is just like us. The son of 50 years old means not only young children but also all ordinary people. It also means that the Buddha tried to lead not only young people but also everybody. The Buddha tries to lead all confused people with patience all the way. We have to be conscious of it as soon as possible and do our best.

A Japanese proverb says, "Although a child doesn't listen to his parents, he imitates his parents." As we see, there are too many juvenile crimes committed recently. It is said that many young people are mentally sick. Many adults may be mentally sick as well. It is also said that a child is just like a mirror reflecting his parents. If so, confused young people are reflections of confused parents. In other words, many parents are confused. That's why many children are confused. No matter who is confused first, the purpose of the Lotus Sutra is to save all the people. We can be happy and live in peace if we believe in the Lotus Sutra

deeply and do our best to follow the teaching. The Lotus Sutra can make you happy. What is the treasure that the son inherited from the father in the story? That is the Lotus Sutra preached about 2,500 years ago as the most precious gift for us from the Buddha. This most precious gift has been teaching us many important things. Nichiren Shonin said that the essence of the Lotus Sutra is the odaimoku.

I don't think that the cause of juvenile crime comes only from young people. I don't say that the cause of youth crime comes only from parents, either.

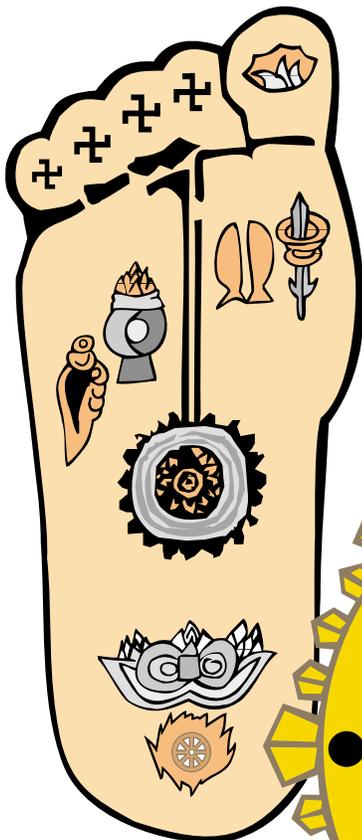
However, parents must be one of the most important factors of juvenile crime. Therefore, we have to save parents in order to save young people at the same time. In other words, we have to focus on the entire family (parents as well as children) in order to deal with crimes committed by youths.

The Lotus Sutra is the sutra for all confused parents and children. Let's be happy together and create a brighter society by believing in the Lotus Sutra and chanting the odaimoku.

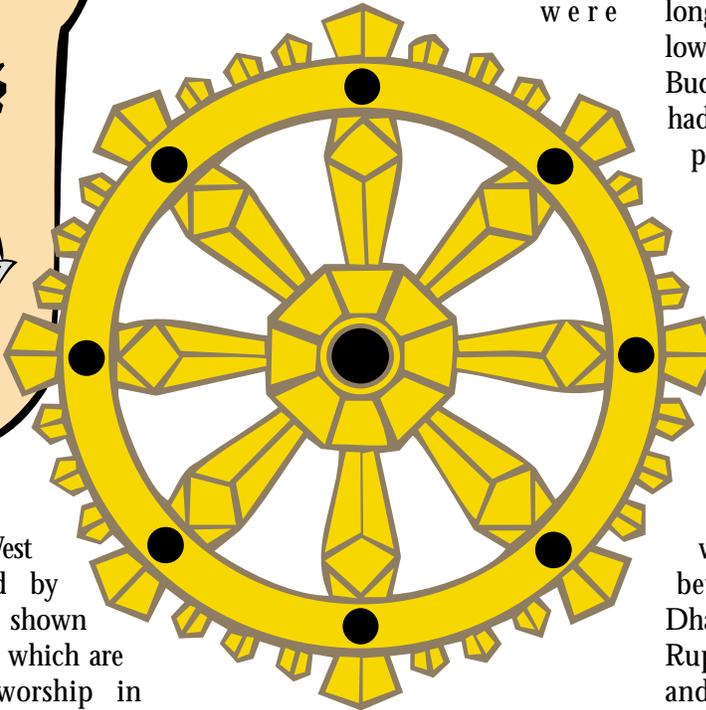


Idol Worship

Rev. Washo Oyamada,
Rev. Ryuei McCormick



In early Buddhism, images of the Bodhi Tree, the Dharma Wheel, or the Buddha's Footprint would be depicted as objects of reverence. As a great and special being who had passed into complete nirvana, the Buddha defied expression in terms of human form. While various objects which indicated the presence of the Buddha were



Many in the West are disturbed by the devotion shown to statues and mandalas which are used as objects of worship in Buddhism. This is perceived to be the worst form of idolatry. The Buddhist tradition itself cautions that the worship of the Buddha in human form is not the point of Buddhism.

often depicted instead of the human form, there was no rule against idolatry. Eventually, under the influence of Hellenistic art, lifelike representations of the Buddha did appear in the

Gandhara region of Northwest India around the beginning of the common era. One of the reasons for the appearance of such images may have been the need to relate to the Buddha as a person. Mahayana Buddhism especially encouraged devotion to the Buddha.

The Buddha's immediate disciples did not look upon the Buddha as a transcendent savior. They saw him as an awakened man who showed the way to liberation which each person must follow for himself or herself. Over the years, however, the longing of the disciples and lay followers' for the actual presence of the Buddha grew. The Buddha himself had made a distinction between his physical presence, which he called the Rupakaya, or Form-body, and the Truth which his teachings and life were expressing, which he called the Dharmakaya, or Dharma-body. The Mahayana Buddhists later developed this teaching in order to satisfy their need for a Buddha who is still an active presence in the world. They kept the distinction between the Rupakaya and the Dharmakaya, but they divided the Rupakaya into the Nirmanakaya and the Sambhogakaya. The Dharmakaya was then given a new interpretation as the true nature of reality rather than merely the body of teachings. The end result was the Mahayana teaching of the Trikaya or Three Bodies of the Buddha.

The first Buddha body is the **Nirmanakaya**, or "**Transformation-body**." This is the historical aspect of a Buddha and refers to the Buddha as a person who is born, becomes enlightened, teaches the Dharma, and then dies.

The second Buddha body is the **Sambhogakaya**, or "**Enjoyment-body**." This is the idealized aspect of the Buddha. This body is adorned with all kinds of special marks and characteristics that symbolize a Buddha's transcendent nature.

The third Buddha body is the **Dharmakaya**, or "**Dharma-body**." This is the Buddha as universal truth, a personification of the true nature of reality itself. The Dharma-body expresses the Wonderful Dharma itself, which is enjoyed by Enjoyment-body and manifested physically by the Transformation-body.

The Dharma-body is formless, and is supposed to be beyond representation.

The Enjoyment-body is only perceived by advanced bodhisattvas with purified sense faculties. The

Transformation-body, which is closest to the original meaning of Form-body, can be seen by ordinary beings and it is this body which was originally depicted in Buddhist art. (In T'ien-t'ai and Nichiren Buddhism the Three Bodies are understood to be three aspects of the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha.)

Shakyamuni Buddha's taught his disciples to "be lights unto yourselves and rely upon yourselves alone, and make the Dharma your light, relying upon it and nothing else." This means that we should follow just the Dharma, and we should not cling to or depend upon our own creations or any other worldly phenomena which are finite and will lead to suffering if they become an object of attachment.

According to this view, for Buddhism, an idol is not only statues or images of the Buddha, but also the craving for sex, wealth, power, or fame; and also nationalism, sexism, ethnocentrism, consumerism.

While Buddhism acknowledges that the devotion shown to representa-

tions of the Buddha can lead to increased faith and devotion to the Dharma, it also teaches that this must not become idolatrous attachment and enslavement to either the physical objects or the ideas which they represent.

In the same way, Buddhism acknowledges that many of our needs and desires have a legitimate place if we are to live a productive, responsible, and healthy life - but we must not overvalue or cling to those things to the point where it creates suffering for ourselves and others.

When it comes to idolatry, one might say that Buddhism sees the potential for idolatry in all things, but also sees that it is not the things themselves but the mind of craving which turns them into idols.

Rather than reject statues or paintings or the world itself, Buddhism tries to teach people how to view these things in the proper perspective so that they no longer enslave us but enhance our lives and lead us to liberation.

● Nirmanakaya



● Sambhogakaya



● Dharmakaya

