

# THE BRIDGE

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## I N D E X

### THE MANY PROBLEMS WE FACE IN MODERN SOCIETY

Professor Kairyu Shimizu

*P. 1~2*



### THE UNCHANGING HEART

Rev. Will Shinkyo Warner

*P. 3~4*



### Q & A

Why did Nichiren Shonin choose  
Sakyamuni Buddha as Honzon,  
the Most Honorable One? *P. 5*

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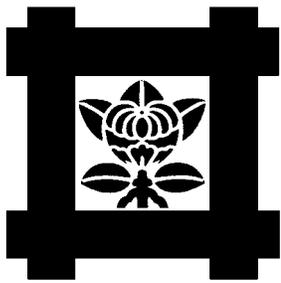
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## The Many Problems



# We Face In Modern Society

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### WE ARE NOT ALONE

We live and exist in the society of fellow humans.

There are 6 billion people on this earth, with the combined population of all areas and countries. And it is not as if all of these people live an isolated life with no human contact.

Each of these six billion people is confronted with problems and hardships, and in varying degrees, must seriously face up to their own problems.

When many people are burdened by the same problems, these become problems for the society. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that these problems cover all areas of life, from birth to death, across clothing, food, and shelter.

### PROBLEMS THAT ACCOMPANY A PERSON'S LIFE

It is well known that Buddhism preaches on the four universal sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. Let us look at what kind of problems would accompany a life of the four universal sufferings.

"Birth" contains complications at the time

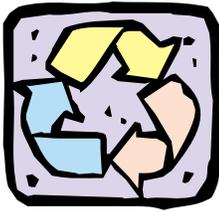
of birth, such as premature births and birth defects. Because of this, methods such as prenatal diagnosis and gene therapy have been popular topics of conversation. In addition, while growing up, there are education and problems, bullying and delinquency problems, and problems related to the growing number of under-age criminal activities. Later in life, one is faced with employment, marital and childcare problems.

"Old age" literally refers to problems related to ageing. These are not limited to problems caused by the gradual loss of function to the individual's mind and body, but also include the surrounding people by relating to care problems.

"Sickness" also includes incurable diseases and symptoms with an unknown cause, in addition to



general illnesses. Since some diseases can only be cured by transplant therapy, organ transplantation is a topic. If the disease is incurable, terminal care is also a problem.



“Death” contains problems with the death itself, such as death with dignity or suicide, as well as post-death issues such as mourner problems.

**PROBLEMS WITH WHERE WE LIVE**

There are also problems in society, the stage on which we act out our lives with the four universal sufferings. The following are a few examples;



“Food” is a necessary element to support human life. Our society lives in the hypocrisy of extravagantly gluttonous eating habits and lifestyle-related diseases.

“Housing” reveals lifestyles in which people are accustomed to living in houses that may have contamination problems such as house dust, to contend with.

On a larger scale, there are problems such as pollution, waste and environmental decline shown in dioxin levels, leading to the pleas from the global environment, as expressed by global warming and the hole in the ozone layer.

**SOMEONE ELSE’S PROBLEM IS YOUR OWN PROBLEM**

Even if you are not immediately confronted with them, these mounting problems cannot be ignored. An isolated problem may be something that could happen to you one day, and even if you don’t individually recognize a large-scale problem, it’s actually affecting you, whether you know it or not.

You must also think about the possibility that the convenient life you lead today may have an adverse effect on others, your future self, or even your descendants.

As long as we live together in this closed environment called earth, we must all realize that this is a two-fold structure in which we could just as easily become the assailant as the victim, simply by living our life.



By ignoring social problems and claiming you don’t care, You are making light of yourself, not to mention the people who are seriously concerned with the problems.

**WHAT LIFE TO LEAD**

In considering the many social problems in this world, it is important to understand the content of each problem, along with how it came to be.

But is it enough to only know these as nothing more than the object of our anger and concern? As long as our existence is the cause for all these problems, this is definitely not enough. If anything, it is necessary that we take another look at how we live our lives as individuals, and how we should live our lives as human beings.

We have created our modern society over the past 100 years, by pursuing economic efficiency and a comfortable life. As a result, we have arrived at a society that is drowning in material things and bombarded by information 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

On one hand, this is an incredibly convenient society where food and goods from all over the world can be procured relatively inexpensively, regardless of the season.

However, as a result of this pursuit for convenience, has modern society not become economically, environmentally and ethically diseased? Now is the time to truly rethink the way you lead your life.

**BUDDHISM AND SOCIETY**

Since its establishment, Buddhism has basically preached the way of being for mankind. Mahayana Buddhism states that the way of each individual’s spirit defines the way of society and the public. Whether or not making this human’s world to the land of Traunqil Light can be realized, is entirely dependent on the way of individual spirits.

In this modern world where the quest for convenience has hit a dead end, there is the need to rethink the way of modern society from a Buddhist standpoint. An important thing to remember when doing so is the concept of symbiosis. In addition to the symbiosis between people, we need to think of the harmonious coexistence of all living beings that exist in this environment called earth, and even more; the symbiosis between the environment itself and ourselves. We must start considering all the problems of modern society from this position.

Nichiren Shonin entered the nearby temple at Mt. Kiyosumi in his twelfth year to further his studies. During the course of the next four years, he started questioning what he was learning.



# The Unchanging Heart

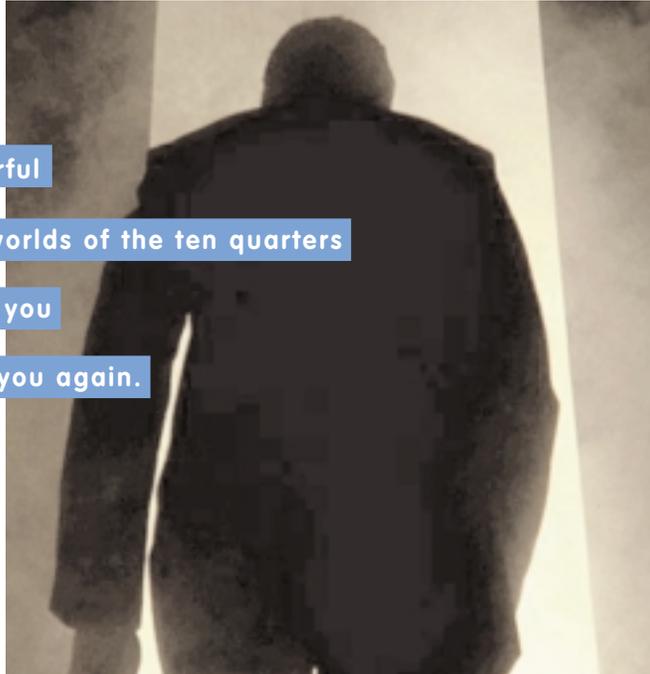
by Rev.  
Will Shinkyō Warner

Your face is most wonderful

Your light illumines the worlds of the ten quarters

I once made offerings to you

Now I have come to see you again.



Having sung this gatha, Gladly-Seen-By-All-Beings Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One! You do not change do you?" (Lotus Sutra, Chapter 23, Murano translation)

What a mysterious organ is the heart! It is always moving, always working. No matter whether we are relaxed and resting, or alert and moving, the heart is always pounding within our breast. The most obvious indication of death is when the heart stops its work, when it is no longer changing within us.

Small wonder then that long ago the heart was considered the organ of consciousness. With all the ideas, schemes, worries and memories we have, it must have seemed that the source of all that activity was the one organ that was constantly active.

We still speak of memorizing things as learning by heart. Desire, the longing for a connection with another human being comes from the heart. From the heart comes spirit, the energy and drive that it takes to make our dreams real. From the heart comes joy, the pleasure that rightly results from good work.

But things could also go wrong with the heart. The pain in the heart from being separated from the people one loves. The heartache of being not getting what one wants in the world. And then there's "hard-heartedness," the description of one so isolated that the suffering of others has no effect on them at all.

When people speak of a "change of heart," this usually means a new understanding of the world, a new realization that changes how one approaches the world, how one behaves in the world. A change of heart is usually a softening, an opening to the possibilities of the world, recognizing that one's selfish desires are not supreme, and that pursuing those desires is itself a weakness.

The most dramatic example of a change of heart was told to me by a young man I met as part of my ministry to the inmates of Kentucky State Penitentiary

in Eddyville. This is Kentucky's maximum-security prison. It houses the men who have committed the most serious crimes: murder, armed robbery, rape, and arson to name a few.

Last June I met a Catholic nun, Sister Chris Beckett, who conducts services at the Penitentiary every week. She knew several inmates who were interested in Buddhism and invited me to visit and meet with them.

My first trip to the Penitentiary was at the end of September. Since it was the only time I had been in a prison, Sister Chris generously took the time to show me around and teach me the rules I'd need to observe during my visit. My intention

this time through was to concentrate on learning from the people I'd be meeting more than teaching them; to find out what I could learn about the lives of the men who wanted to see me and consider carefully what I'd be able to do for them.

The man I spent the most time talking with was R. A. Seven years ago, during a robbery, R. A. beat a man to death in about 6 seconds. He is currently serving a life sentence. His first chance for parole will come after he has spent 25 years behind bars.

R. A. knows now that he has a problem with anger, that the responses he has developed to people he thought were a threat to him were, shall we say, not appropriate. Even today, he cannot go to the prison gymnasium and hit a body bag. Its similarity to a human being is too much, and he loses control of himself.

After being sent to Eddyville, R. A. began to study Buddhism. His sources have been books and other inmates who practice Buddhism. He has also received instruction from the Venerable Robina Courtin, a nun who practices one of the Tibetan traditions and visits the penitentiary a few times each year.

In Buddhism R. A. finds a chance to learn more about his responses, to become more conscious of his habits of thought, and work to change them. It isn't enough for him to just understand that how he responds is wrong. He needs a practical way of changing those habits. In other words, he wants to change his heart.

Robina has taught him meditation, prayers and prostration. She has also gone through the four noble truths, eight right ways, and the necessity of seeking compassion and wisdom in all one's actions. It's hard work, and it seems to have paid off.

About a year ago a situation came up that tested severely R's reactions and capabilities. In the prison is what is called the Lockdown Unit. This is where inmates who violate prison rules are sent as punishment. It's not exactly solitary confinement, but the men in that unit are cut off from contact with the general population of the prison.

Smuggling things into the lockdown unit can be lucrative. What gets smuggled in isn't necessarily exotic. For the rest of the inmates they are just everyday things: cigarettes, chewing gum or candy. If someone wants to deliberately get himself in this unit, he just has to break a fundamental rule. One sure way to do this is to be involved in a fight.

In the center of the prison is a large outdoor exercise area known as the "yard."

One afternoon another prisoner intent on getting himself into lockdown tried to pick a fight with R. A. in the middle of the yard. Knowing R's disposition towards violence he was probably counting on R's response being severe enough that the fight would land them both in lockdown.

R. A. knew that the other man didn't have a weapon. Thanks to what he had gained from his Buddhist practice, he was also able to control his initial reaction: fighting back with all the murderous fury he knew he was capable of. Instead, R. A. curled up into a fetal position and fell to the ground. Other inmates, seeing what happened, rushed over to protect R. A.

When R. A. told me this story, I had to tell him how much of an inspiration he was to me. There have been so many times in my life that I've been angry, maybe even angry enough to do great harm to someone. There have been times that I've let loose words that I later regret, or done destructive things that may have made me feel better momentarily. Hearing how R. A. had been able to transform his anger was simply breathtaking.

He seemed happy to hear this, but knew that he had a lot more work to do, and wanted my help with it. He knew that he had grown up with many illusions. The main one being that violence solves problems. Washing away those illusions was his work now, and his practice of Buddhism was helping tremendously.

I asked R. A. who he fell to the ground for? Was it for himself or his attacker? He said he hadn't thought about it. When it happened there wasn't time to think. He just knew that returning the violence wasn't the right thing to do.

I suggested that at some level he wanted to benefit his attacker by refusing to fight. It was his compassion for his attacker, his desire to benefit his attacker and himself instead of wanting to hurt his attacker. That was the true sign of his change of heart.

Thinking of R's story now, I understand differently what happens to our hearts when they change. It's not just a random change. There is a goal. Compassion is the link from our heart to another heart. It shows us that we are not separate entities, that there are similarities between us. These similarities may take a long time to find, but it is the faith of compassion that leads us to know they are there and helps us to continue our search for them.

Beyond human hearts though, there are other hearts. Other beings that share these worlds with us also have hearts. Our compassion for them, and theirs for us, leads us to their hearts and the heart we have in common with them.

At the heart of all these hearts is the heart that does not change. It is the heart that exists within all of us, that we find when we scrape away the crusts of our own illusions. It is the heart that exists as the source of our purpose and existence. It is the unchanging heart of the Buddha.

Knowing about this heart is the foundation of our faith. Finding this heart has been our work through many lifetimes. What we do from this heart is how we of repay the Buddha for the heart he has shown us.

" change of heart "



# Q

## Why did Nichiren Shonin choose Sakyamuni Buddha as Honzon, the Most Honorable One?

# A

The idea of Mappo (the declining age of the Dharma) was prevalent at this time, and the belief in Jodo (Pure Land) Shu, where you would be saved in your after-life by chanting the name of the Amitabha Buddha in this life, was very popular among the general public. The worship of many Guardian Gods such as Acala of the Shingon Shu, and of the Bodhisattvas such as the Eleven-Faced Kannon and the Nyoirin Kannon were also popular. Seichoji Temple, where Nichiren Shonin studied, had Akasa-Garbha-Bodhisattva as its principal deity, and also worshipped many Guardian Gods and Bodhisattvas such as Acala.

Nichiren Shonin's childhood name was Yakuomaro. Yakuomaro saw that many Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Guardian Gods were worshipped, but with the question of which deity on which to focus his religious devotion on growing stronger, he finally decided to enter priesthood and thoroughly pursue this question. He prayed to Seichoji Temple's Akasa-Garbha-Bodhisattva to make him the wisest man in Japan, and with this blessing dedicated himself to his studies.

His hard work can be seen in examples such as the copying of the sacred Shingon Shu text "Juketsu Entaragishu" (this book is still carefully preserved at the Kanazawa Library). Yakuomaro continued by studying Jodo Shu and Zen Shu in Kamakura, and at Mt. Hiei in Kyoto, which could be considered the foremost Buddhist University of the time. Mt. Hiei is a temple founded by Dengyo Daishi Saicho as a new Tendai Shu temple, serving the purpose of a Buddhist center, and competing with Nara's Todaiji Temple, Kofukuji Temple and Yakushiji Temple. Located in the northern region of Mt. Hiei, Yokawa was noted for its harsh climate, but it held great personal meaning as it was set up by Jikaku Daishi Ennin, who reestablished Seichoji Temple, so Nichiren Shonin chose to study here.

As Nichiren Shonin studied and compared the many temples in Kyoto and the numerous Buddhist sects of Nara and Mt. Koya, he finally came to a conclusion. This was that although there are many Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Guardian Gods such as Dainichi Buddha, Yakushi Buddha, and Amitabha Buddha worshipped in this world, these Buddhas all inhabit a world other than our own earthly domain of Saha. Since Sakyamuni Buddha inhabits the same world as we do, we should naturally follow the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha.

The Lotus Sutra is the scripture that teaches this, also explaining that Sakyamuni Buddha has been spreading knowledge since the time of "eternity," so many unfathomable years ago.

***This triple world is my property. All living beings therein are my children. There are many sufferings in this world. Only I can save all living beings.***  
*The Lotus Sutra - Chapter Three: Parable*

"My property" is the Virtue of the Sovereign, "my children" is the Virtue of the Parent, and

"save them" is the Virtue of the Teacher. From this, the only Buddha that combines all of the Three Aspects of the Buddha's Virtue is Sakyamuni Buddha.

Amitabha Buddha is the Buddha of the Western Pure Land, and the Yakushi Buddha is the Buddha of the Eastern Land of the Lapis lazuli. They are therefore excluded from the Virtue of the Sovereign and the Virtue of the Parent.

In addition, in Chapter Sixteen: The Duration of the Life of the Buddha, he states "I became a Buddha in the infinite past, my life is also infinite, I always exist in this world and will never be extinct." Also, "From the infinite past I have existed in this Saha world, teaching and leading the way for all living beings. During my existence from the infinite past, I have spoken of things such as the Dipankara Buddha."

In this way Sakyamuni Buddha clearly explains how he has been teaching in this Saha world from the infinite past, and during that time he has set up Dipankara Buddha or other Buddhas as temporary masters, in response to the needs and desires of the people. Thus, Sakyamuni Buddha reveals his original.

Nichiren Shonin was able to fulfill his destiny for entering the priesthood by finding the "Buddha," and in doing so has shown us the truth. There are some sects that twist these words to say that Sakyamuni Buddha is nothing but an empty shell of an old Buddha and that we should be worshipping Nichiren Shonin himself, but this is an incorrect teaching of his words. Nichiren Shonin accepted his life mission to spread Sakyamuni Buddha and the precious teachings of the Lotus Sutra to the people of the world.

Let us understand Nichiren Shonin's heart, and strive to fulfill his will.

*(the Reverend Chiko Ichikawa, from "Ikegami")*

