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Stephen G. COVELL

Learning to Persevere

The Popular Teachings of Tendai Ascetics

This paper introduces the teachings of three contemporary practitioners of Tendai Buddhism. I argue that the study of Japanese Buddhism has focused on doctrine and the past to the detriment of our understanding of contemporary teaching. Through an examination of the teachings of contemporary practitioners of austerities, I show that practice is drawn on as a source more than classical doctrine, that conservative values are prized, and that the teachings show strong similarities to the teachings of the new religions, suggesting a broad-based shared worldview.

KEYWORDS: Tendai – *kaihōgyō* – morals – education – new religions

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WITH A FEW notable exceptions the study of Japanese Buddhism tends to be the study of the distant past.¹ Japanese Buddhism, with the exclusion of modern movements known as new or new new religions, is rarely portrayed as a living religion. Indeed, contemporary temple Buddhism (“traditional Buddhism”) is best known as “funeral Buddhism,” a term used to describe its primary ritual and social role. It is roundly assumed, moreover, that contemporary temple Buddhism itself is in need of a funeral, the life in its teachings having passed away centuries ago. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, this perception stems from the idea that “real” Buddhism has degenerated over time, and from the concomitant lack of scholarly interest in contemporary teachings and practices.² This paper will introduce the teachings of three contemporary practitioners of Tendai Buddhism. All three successfully completed the grueling thousand-day circumambulation (*sennichi kaihōgyō* 千日回峰行) in which practitioners walk distances equal to the circumference of the globe over a period of seven years. An examination of their teachings will show strong similarities to those of the new religions, suggesting a broad-based shared worldview. Such a worldview has not been observed within temple Buddhism because its teachings have been sought almost exclusively within classical doctrine.

The teachings of traditional Buddhist sects are usually understood as those of the founders or other prominent priests from the distant past. For example, at Taishō University, a university affiliated with the Tendai sect,³ young priests are required to study the Tendai classics known as the Three Great Texts (*sandaibu* 三大部),⁴ as well as the teachings of Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the founder of Japanese Tendai. At Gyōin 行院, the main training temple on Mt. Hiei, all priests must complete an intensive and exhausting two-month program in which they master

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1. Recent book-length works in English on modern Japanese Buddhism include JAFFE 2001 and READER and TANABE 1998.

2. For more on this topic see my forthcoming book *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

3. Taishō University is also affiliated with the Jōdō sect and the Buzan and Chizan branches of the Shingon sect.

4. The *sandaibu* are the major writings of Chih-i. They are the *Mo ho chih kuan* (Jp. *Makashikan* 摩訶止觀), the *Fa hua hsüan i* (Jp. *Hokke gengi* 法華玄義), and the *Fa hua wên chü* (Jp. *Hokke mongu* 法華文句).

ceremonial protocol, review the teachings of Tendai founders Saichō and Chih-i 智顛 (538–597), and read the Lotus Sutra, the central text of Tendai. What is taught at both places as “Tendai teachings” is drawn from the texts of the founders of Tendai and the writings of later famous priests such as Ennin 円仁 (794–864). For example, Chih-i’s “three thousand thoughts in a single moment,” (*ichinen sanzen* 一念三千) and the ordering of Buddhist teachings attributed to him, “the five periods and eight teachings” (*gojihakkyō* 五時八教), are required learning for all prospective Tendai priests.

This same material is drawn upon by Western and Japanese scholars in any discussion of Tendai teachings. While these teachings play an important and formative role in the study and practice of Tendai today, they nevertheless represent only a fraction of the material that needs to be examined to understand the teachings of Tendai as a living tradition. The teachings of contemporary Tendai must be sought not only in the classical texts, but also in the collected stories, sermons, and articles found, for example, on the Light Up Your Corner Movement (*Ichigū o terasu undō* 一隅を照らす運動) webpage (www.tendai.or.jp/ichigu/). This movement, directed primarily at lay members, is now thirty years old and is highly representative of Tendai sectarian activities today. The movement seeks to increase Tendai lay member awareness of basic Tendai teachings and to engage priests and laity in public welfare, international aid, and environmental activities. Every year all across Japan large meetings are held at which priests and laity involved in the movement gather to celebrate that year’s successes and to participate in the chanting of sutras and other activities.

Contemporary Tendai teachings must be sought in the writings and proclamations of popular charismatic Tendai figures, such as Yamada Etai 山田恵諦 (the two-hundred-and-fifty-third head priest of Tendai), Setouchi Jakuchō 瀬戸内寂聴 (a popular novelist/nun), Kōno Jikō 河野慈光 (a nun), and those who finish the *kaihōgyō* and other austerities. Together they have produced, or been the subject of, dozens of books, articles, videos, and documentaries and, arguably, have a greater direct impact on society than the cerebral ruminations of scholar-priests and academics.

The *kaihōgyō* practitioners, for example, clearly draw on their practice—as the wellspring of their teachings. There are a few open references to classical texts, but the main emphasis is on practice. One states plainly that he does not seek outside material as a source for his teaching. “What I have to say does not come from having read scholarly works or books, nor does it come from something I heard from a school teacher. The heart of what I talk about comes from things I realized as I was walking and which I never forgot” (SAKAI and Kō 2003, p. 99). During a recent trip to Japan I asked two priests who had completed the first one-hundred-day segment of the *kaihōgyō* as part of their three-year retreat on Mt. Hiei if they believed that *kaihōgyō* practitioners derived their teachings from their master’s statements. The

response was a resounding no. While they felt there was influence, they believed the source of their teachings was the physical practice of walking and persevering.⁵ Despite such statements, we cannot entirely discount classical sources for some of their teachings, since each was indoctrinated into classical Tendai doctrine during the course of his training. We can also find references to classical doctrine, especially the teachings of Saichō, in some of their writings.

Hagami Shōchō 葉上照澄 (1903–1989), Mitsunaga Kakudō 光永覚道 (1954–), and Sakai Yūsai 酒井雄哉 (1926–), have all completed the *kaihōgyō* (Sakai twice) and have all written for popular consumption.⁶ In addition, they have been in demand as guest speakers at temples and other venues around the country. They are part of a small cadre of the Buddhist priesthood in Japan today that, due to particular circumstances, generally related to successful completion of difficult and lengthy austerities, command a broad audience of readers and faithful. Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai have been able to reach a wide audience primarily through renown at having completed the *kaihōgyō*. The *kaihōgyō*, in which the practitioners engage in walking meditation by traversing a mountainous route of over thirty kilometers daily for one thousand days, is perhaps the best known of traditional Tendai practices today. The mystique of “living Buddhas” (*ikibotoke* 生仏), as successful practitioners are known, making their way over ancient mountain trails in flowing white robes before the first light of dawn, draws popular and, to a lesser extent, scholarly attention.⁷ Pictures of them can be found on the Tendai sect webpage (www.tendai.or.jp/), in magazine and newspaper articles, on travel brochures, and on the covers of books about Tendai or Mt. Hiei. NHK, the Japanese national public television station, the BBC, and, most recently, a French documentary filmmaker have all produced documentaries about the practice.⁸

In order to understand the source of their charisma and by way of providing background into the foundation of their teachings, a brief introduction to the *kaihōgyō* follows. Twelve people have completed the practice in the postwar period. The practice today is made up of ten one-hundred-day segments spread

5. Conversation at Jindaiji, Tokyo, 4 March 2004.

6. Only three people have successfully completed the *kaihōgyō* twice since the Muromachi period. One of these, Masai Kanjun (1860–1913), died five hundred days into his third attempt.

7. In English see RHODES 1987 and STEVENS 1988.

8. *NHK Tokushū gyō Hieizan sennichi kaihōgyō*, 1979. See also the book written by the director of the NHK special, WAZAKI Nobuya (1979). A sneak preview of the French documentary, *Les mille jours, ou la marche éternelle d'AJari* (Daniel Moreau, director, Dia Film Production, 1999), was shown to Tendai priests in the Tokyo area before its debut in Kyoto in 1999. The BBC-produced *The Marathon Monks of Mt. Hiei* (Christopher Hayes, director, 1993) was later released in a North American version (2002). It is based on John Stevens's book, *The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei*. Despite flaws in the film—primarily its stress on the practice as a form of marathon—this documentary has been very effective in my Introduction to Japanese Religions class. Regarding the “marathon” image Hagami Shōchō states, “If it were only about walking, the postman would be far greater. Our job is worshipping as we walk” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 60).

over a seven-year period.⁹ During each segment, the practitioner is required to walk from one site to the next, over the entirety of Mt. Hiei's three main peaks, covering a total of over thirty kilometers and as many as three hundred sites per day. He awakes at midnight to begin his practice, is back in time to perform morning services, and then begins his regular daytime priestly duties. He must proceed with his practice regardless of the weather or his own physical condition. At each stop along the way he must chant the proper mantra (*shingon* 真言) and/or sutra, and perform the proper mudra (*in* 印). After the seventh segment the practitioner undertakes *dōiri* 堂入, literally "entering the temple," during which a living funeral is performed for him. He then enters the temple where he remains without sleeping, eating, drinking, or laying down for nine days. There are assistants present to make sure he fulfills the requirements as well as to assist him should he need help. During this period he is expected to perform daily services, recite Fudō-Myōō's mantra one hundred thousand times, and to chant the complete Lotus Sutra once.

During the eighth one-hundred-day segment, a trip to Sekizansen' in 赤山禪院, a temple in Kyoto, is added to the journey, increasing the route by approximately twenty kilometers. This is called *Sekizan kugyō* 赤山苦行 (Sekizan austerity or, literally, the suffering practice of Sekizan). The ninth segment is called the *Kyōto omawari* 京都お巡り. During this period the practitioner makes a long circuitous trip through Kyoto, and on the way blesses the faithful who line the streets. After the fiftieth day he is expected to stop occasionally to pray at the homes of those who request his presence. This brings the length of the route to nearly ninety kilometers. He stays in Kyoto before completing the trip back to Mt. Hiei the next day. He begins his last one-hundred day segment not long after completion of the *Kyōto omawari*.

The practice up to *dōiri* is referred to as *jōgubodai* 上求菩提, or practice done looking up towards achieving enlightenment. Practice following *dōiri* is called *gekeshujō* 下化衆生, or practice looking back towards those still in need of aid. The first half is thus preparatory practice (*zengyō* 前行) in which the practitioner readies mind and body for the task of saving others. Once he has mastered himself, he is ready to turn around, in bodhisattva tradition, and aid those further back on the path.

The practice, seen as an office, and the successful completion of it, transform the practitioner into a charismatic figure. Shimazono Susumu, writing on

9. The practice developed over time. It is said to have its roots in the activities of Sōō Kashō (831–918). The outlines of its current form can be traced to the Muromachi period (1392–1573). Records of the practice as it existed previous to the Muromachi period appear to have been lost when Oda Nobunaga razed the temples of Mt. Hiei. Einami Sogen, a powerful reformer of postwar Tendai, and himself a successful practitioner of the *kaihōgyō*, shaped the practice as it is known today. There are two routes open today: the Mudōji *kaihō*, which is the most popular route (and the shortest), and the Imuro *kaihō*, which was first completed in the modern period by Sakai Yūsai in 1980.

charisma in the new religions of Japan, states that there are two types of “supernatural” charisma: (1) primary, or that which is possessed divinely or innately, and (2) secondary, or that which is endowed to certain classes of individuals such as monks (SHIMAZONO 1982, p. 156). *Kaihōgyō* practitioners can be understood as possessing both secondary charisma through the office of “*kaihōgyō* practitioner” and primary charisma through the completion of a practice that turns them into living Buddhas. The practice itself is a source of charisma not simply due to the “office,” but due to the long association in Japan of mountain austerities with the acquisition of exceptional powers. Miyake Hitoshi makes clear the special nature of mountains in Japanese religious practice and the manner in which those who undergo austerities in the mountains can be transformed in the eyes of the faithful into exceptional beings (MIYAKE 2001, chapters 3–5).

Shimazono further remarks that charisma is dependent upon a specific kind of relationship between individuals in which the charismatic figure serves as a vessel for the aspirations of the followers. This, in turn, is closely linked to Shimazono’s definition of charisma as resting “on the keen awareness of differences in individual ability” (SHIMAZONO 1982, p. 157). Many regard the *kaihōgyō* practitioners as having completed a task far beyond the abilities of average people. Their followers, in turn, invest great emotional and at times financial capital in them to see their own hopes fulfilled. This image is particularly strong in videos of the practice in which one can see people line the streets or wait by mountain roadsides in the predawn hours to be blessed by the practitioner. There are also those who work in support groups to assure that the practitioner’s needs are met. Their hopes for salvation are linked to his success.

The above discussion regarding charisma helps to explain the popularity of the *kaihōgyō* practitioners among the laity closely associated with, and in close proximity to, the practice. It also may explain their popularity within the Tendai sect more generally. This popularity is seen in the regular demand for their appearance at Tendai events across the country, but it does not as readily explain their more general appeal as authors. For example, one of MITSUNAGA’s books, *Sennichi kaihōgyō*, originally published in 1996, is already in its eighth printing. He has also written three additional books since then. This appeal may be more directly linked to what Shimazono calls “prophetic” charisma, which is defined as “the ability to address the existential core of the life of the believer.” The popularity of these author/practitioners suggests that we should add the category “reader” to Shimazono’s definition. *Kaihōgyō* practitioners direct their teachings to the *kokoro* 心, or heart/mind. “What they intend to overcome is not the crisis posed by particular or immediate problems, but the crisis of the heart, the existential crisis that permeates one’s whole life” (SHIMAZONO 1982, p. 160). The writings of the *kaihōgyō* practitioners, while often addressing specific issues, seek to explain what is wrong with the world in a broad sense and how

one can solve one's existential crisis—transform one's *kokoro*—through placing one's own problems within the greater context.

Hagami Shōchō: Background

Hagami Shōchō was born in 1903 in Okayama prefecture. He did not begin training on Mt. Hiei until the age of forty-four in 1947. Before entering the priesthood Hagami studied German philosophy at Tokyo University, married, and worked for a newspaper. His wife passed away when he was thirty-three. A self-described “semi-intellectual,” he chose to enter the priesthood because he felt he “must change his life.” He could no longer go on “just being someone who uses only his head” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 79).

Hagami completed the one-thousand day *kaihōgyō* on 18 September 1954 at the age of fifty-one. He began his practice at a time of great change for Japan. World War II had just ended and the country was still under occupation. By the time his book, *Dōshin: Kaihōgyō no taiken* 道心—回峰行の体験 [Will to enlightenment: The *kaihōgyō* experience]; later reprinted under the title, *Kaihōgyō no kokoro: Waga dōshin*, [The spirit of the *kaihōgyō*: My will to enlightenment]) was published in 1971, Japan had experienced what many felt was a miraculous recovery and was in a period of high growth.¹⁰ While the economy boomed, many in educational, political, and religious circles began to agitate for a return to the so-called “traditional Japanese values” believed abandoned in the aftermath of World War II. It was hoped that such values would act as a remedy to the perceived greed, unfettered consumption, and excess that accompanied economic success. Hagami, too, as will be shown, emphasizes a return to traditional values. He clearly believes that the youth of Japan are in dire need of moral guidance, and thus recommends a worldview that is steeped in traditional values and character building.

HAGAMI ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: IN DEFENSE OF TRADITION

Hagami appears to long for the past, for a simpler time when people admired and aspired to traditional values. In addition to looking back on the prewar period emperor system with nostalgia and lamenting the attitude of contemporary youth, he also spends considerable time defending Buddhism from critiques that it is not fit for the modern world.

Born in 1903, in the Meiji era, during which the Imperial household was central to state ideology, Hagami expresses great joy at being able, in the final rite of the *kaihōgyō*, to pray for the imperial family.¹¹ Throughout his writings he

10. This book was first printed in 1971 under the title *Dōshin: Kaihōgyō no taiken*, and was reprinted in 1974. The edition drawn on here was published in 1997.

11. This rite is known as the *dosokusandai* 土足参内. The practitioner, accompanied by the head priest of Tendai and trailed by a procession of priests, enters the Imperial Palace in Kyoto without

self-consciously remarks on the importance of this rite, at one point stating “that we think the Imperial Palace is the greatest place, maybe because we were born in the Meiji period” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 86).

Related to his nostalgia for the emperor, he also discusses the crucial nature of nation-defending (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家) rites in the Tendai sect. Hagami notes that each day practitioners turn to face the direction of the palace gates and offer prayers. “Despite all that has been said about the emperor system after the war, I think that performing empowerment rites [facing the Imperial Palace] everyday for eight hundred days over six long years is meaningful” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 53). Cutting across sectarian boundaries, the practice of performing rites to defend the nation has a long history in Japan. Tendai, in particular, has been so closely associated with nation-defending theories, that a leading member of the Tendai sect felt it necessary to include a reference to such teachings in a short essay he wrote apologizing for Tendai’s contribution to the Japan’s modern wars (SUGITANI 1995).

Hagami’s reflections on the past are related to his uncertainty about Japan’s present and his fear for its future. He imagines Japan as moving away from traditions too easily dismissed following defeat in World War II and worries that the country, shorn from the past—which he sees as the anchor of morals—has been set adrift, rudderless. Throughout his writings Hagami seeks to convey the view that past traditions can be of great contemporary value, especially as a means to establish common moral groundings.

Contemporary Japanese youth, for example, appear to be far different from those Hagami remembers growing up with as a child in the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taisho (1912–1926) eras. He repeatedly notes with trepidation that youth today are overly materialistic, divorced from a religious moral base, and disrespectful of the traditions that once provided the foundation for Japanese moral character.

According to Hagami, this contempt for their country’s past has led to a loss of self-esteem. Because traditional values were removed from the curriculum at public schools, those charged with educating Japanese youth are faced with the difficulty of instilling pride in their charges while avoiding discussion of traditional values. And as he notes, “Without pride you can only fall” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 173).

Critiques of traditional values not only link them with the failed wartime state, but also portray them as premodern. In a line of argument that calls to mind Meiji-period defenses of Buddhism, in which Buddhism was framed as a philosophy as opposed to a primitive “religious” or “magical” system, Hagami argues that tradition is “not a foolish thing, it continues to exist for logical reasons” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 99).¹² The *kaihōgyō*, he maintains by way of example, is precision tuned. It survived one thousand years for a reason. Each act, the order

removing his sandals to pray for the health of the Imperial family.

12. For more on the Meiji debate see KETELAAR 1990.

of the acts, and the times at which they are carried out, are designed to push the practitioner to his limits without killing him. Similar to Meiji arguments that Buddhism was fit for the modern world, he frequently portrays Buddhism as scientific and logical in nature. He relates the story of how when he first decided to undertake the *kaihōgyō* he had reservations about the attire.¹³ “To be honest, [this practice] can only be understood as complete ‘nonsense’ if seen simply as running around and around the same place day in and day out praying to trees and rocks wearing an anachronistic costume” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 8). Hagami says he soon realized each article of clothing as well as each action had a purpose. The attire was very “logical”: The lotus hat was streamlined making it just the right fit for narrow tree-lined mountain trails, the straw sandals were light and flexible, and yet their construction forced one to walk softly and carefully. He concluded that, “There are few things that are as scientific and as deeply religious as this” (HAGAMI 1997, p. 9).

In fact, Hagami continues, the whole of the *kaihōgyō* practice is based on logic and, thus, science. Like science it combines experience with repeated testing (HAGAMI 1997, p. 14). Thus, traditional Buddhism, as the *kaihōgyō* demonstrates, is not something that should be forsaken as a useless vestige of the past, but is something that is very “logical” and “scientific” in nature and, therefore, relevant to the modern world. Traditional practices, he argues, survive because they retain their relevance by proving themselves time and again. Moreover, pride derived from participation in time-honored traditions leads to self-esteem. Here he is clearly addressing the aforementioned lack of confidence among Japanese youth.

Hagami goes on to emphasize, however, that, in addition to being scientific and logical, Buddhism is super-rational (*gōri o norikoeteiru* 合理を乗り越えている): that is, it goes beyond the limits imposed by purely rational thought. Returning again to the *kaihōgyō* as example, he states that though based on scientific logic, it is also a “deeply religious” practice and, therefore, something that surpasses science (*kagaku o koeta mono* 科学を超えたもの). What allows this is faith (HAGAMI 1997, pp. 14, 32). This is what Hagami believes gives Buddhism its power and one of the reasons why he recommends it over other alternatives. He argues that Buddhism is rational and yet super-rational, scientific and yet capable of penetrating beyond the limits of science. He adds that Buddhism is locally based and yet international in scope (HAGAMI 1997, p. 120).

Hagami is not alone in his use of the term “international”: the Tendai sect and many other religious groups also seek to demonstrate the quality of their practices by showing that their effectiveness is not limited to Japan. As Ketelaar has shown, the move to describe Buddhism as a global or world religion,

13. *Kaihōgyō* practitioners wear garb that is said to go back to the earliest periods of the practice: white robes, straw sandals, and a lotus-shaped hat.

stretching beyond the limitations of regional sectarianism, was a major part of the re-signification of Buddhism that began in the Meiji period. Hagami never informs the reader directly that he is conscious of his own mimicking of Meiji arguments. Yet, it is evident that he feels continuing critiques of Buddhism as pre-modern must be answered. Just as his Meiji predecessors, Hagami seeks to demonstrate Buddhism's relevance to the modern world. The critiques Hagami faces often are more oblique than Meiji period critiques, which were regularly leveled directly by government authorities, Shinto nationalists, and National Learning (*kokugaku* 国学) scholars. Contemporary critiques are perhaps more popular in nature, appearing in the mass media or by word of mouth among disgruntled laity. The success of the new religions, in particular, is often interpreted as a critique of temple Buddhism.

Hagami expends considerable effort defending temple Buddhism against the new religions. He states, "That which is old but new is the real thing, that which is old and dated is not, and that which is simply new disappears" (HAGAMI 1997, p. 173). By this he means that traditions that survive and retain their relevance are to be trusted, unlike trendy fads. Here Hagami is addressing the dramatic increase in the strength of new religious movements during his time, especially that of Sōka Gakkai.¹⁴

Hagami attacks Sōka Gakkai for its radical exclusivism. And he attacks Nichiren, on whose teachings Sōka Gakkai is based. "If I had to put it in to words I would say, Nichiren is from, what, about six-hundred years ago? For us modern people he's like Sōka Gakkai today, which goes around calling everyone else false religion. That's not Buddhism" (HAGAMI 1997, p. 63). Through attacking the relative newness of Nichiren or Sōka Gakkai, Hagami attacks their legitimacy. Sōka Gakkai today, he asserts, is the same as Nichiren in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). It is an upstart newcomer that feels it must define itself by attacking all that came before. Its success, Hagami appears to believe, only speaks to the worrisome condition of contemporary Japanese character.

Hagami attacks Nichiren and, by association, Sōka Gakkai by carrying on a centuries-old debate regarding exclusivistic single practices. "In Japanese Buddhism during the Kamakura period there was a strong tendency to stress simply one [practice]. From the point of view of faith (*shinkō* 信仰) that, too, may be a real option, but I think there is something odd about an anti-others, self-righteous attitude" (HAGAMI 1997, p. 24). The sects of Kamakura Buddhism emphasized single practices: Jōdō and Jōdō-shin the *nenbutsu* (chanting Amida Buddha's name), Sōtō and Rinzai sitting or *kōan* meditation, and Nichiren the *daimoku* (chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra). Hagami writes that whereas the focus and effort of

14. Sōka Gakkai is one of Japan's largest new religions. It is based on the teaching of Nichiren. Unlike many other new religions, which rarely posed a direct threat to temple Buddhism, Sōka Gakkai refused to allow dual affiliation and, thus, posed a significant threat.

these sects should be applauded, their exclusivism is potentially dangerous because it denies other viewpoints. This opinion mirrors the standard Tendai rhetoric of inclusivism as taught to all Tendai priests during their training. Indeed, Tendai, in a move that places it at the historical, religious, and cultural center of Japanese Buddhism, is commonly depicted as the mother of Japanese Buddhism from which sprang later exclusivistic offspring. One section on Tendai's home page (www.hieizan.or.jp/enryakuji/jcont/access/mother/index.html) is dedicated to this metaphor, replete with a picture of Mt. Hiei and Saichō in the center and, flowing out from them, Nichiren, Shinran, Hōnen, Eisai, and Dōgen with the title "The Mother: The Mountain as Mother."

Against the alleged exclusivism of the new religions and other Buddhist sects, Hagami argues that the openness of Saichō and the inclusive nature of the (Tendai) Lotus teachings are what is needed to bring unity and a solid religious foundation back to Japan. Tendai's inclusivity, Hagami teaches, is what made it great and what allowed these other schools to form.

Hagami's reservations concerning exclusivity also reflect anxiety about Tendai's contemporary situation. In the postwar period, changes in the laws governing the incorporation of religious organizations made breaking away from the parent organization (school/sect) easier than before. The abbots and lay leaders of large temples and small began considering severing their ties with the sect.¹⁵ Hagami appears to have worried about this trend, "Now, once again, in this small Tendai sect the wave of schisms is flowing. Yet, especially given this situation, I believe now is the time to build a new and true unifying principle and base" (HAGAMI 1997, pp. 24–25). Faced with exclusivistic new religions and schisms within the traditional sects, Hagami argues that Japan needs to "return" to a unified Buddhism. He is not specific about how to go about creating a unified Buddhism, though he does offer trans-sectarian pilgrimages as one example where such a unified Buddhist practice is in evidence. Regardless, he stresses that a firm, unified religious (Buddhist) base is necessary if Japan is to rebuild itself.

HAGAMI ON PRACTICE: CHARACTER BUILDING

Based on his experience of the *kaihōgyō*, Hagami's teachings include perseverance, sincerity, inter-dependence, and the importance of role models. Hagami frequently laments the woeful state of education in Japan and the lack of resolve among the nation's youth. He writes that it is to Japan's loss that schools no longer instill strength of character in students. In particular, they fail to teach the young to patiently persevere (*shinbōshite yarinuku* 辛抱してやりぬく). "Today that 'come-what-may' fighting spirit is all but gone. And, there is no

15. Shugenhonshū, Washū, and Seikannonshū all broke away from Tendaishū during the postwar period.

longer the disposition to patiently persevere. Without this, how can an international superpower be built?" (HAGAMI 1997, p. 85).

In order to nurture the ability to persevere and realize the strength of character found therein, Hagami teaches that people must learn that the fruit of practice is the process itself. Focusing on the goal line would make practices such as the *kaihōgyō* nearly impossible and would obscure their true lesson. Hagami reminds the reader that what is needed in life, and what the *kaihōgyō* teaches, is an attitude of "*nanikuso*" or "come-what-may-determination" (HAGAMI 1997, p. 84). One must always show resolve and see things through to the end. This is true not just for the *kaihōgyō* but also for daily life; one cannot be overwhelmed by difficulties (HAGAMI 1997, pp. 121–23). Here he is directly appealing to the members of Japan's workforce, the fabled salarymen, whose life of unwavering dedication, endless hours of overtime, and stubborn determination has been lionized in numerous *manga* and television dramas. Hagami's practice of completing seemingly impossible austerities appears to both strike a familiar chord with them and serve as a role model for them.

In addition to perseverance, Hagami teaches the need for sincerity. He draws on the founder of Japanese Tendai, Saichō, as an example. He writes that Saichō was different from other great teachers, such as his contemporary rival Kūkai 空海 (774–835), the founder of the Shingon sect. Hagami claims that an examination of their calligraphy shows that, although Kūkai may have been a genius, he lacked Saichō's sincerity, a quality that Hagami claims all true religion must possess, though he fails to explain just how the lack of sincerity is determined. "The spirit of Hieizan is sincerity. Put another way it is purity. It's *pi-yu-ri-ti* [emphasis in original]. Religion and art are meaningless without this. Even Mt. Hiei is valueless without this" (HAGAMI 1986, p. 220). Hagami points to Saichō's teaching that one must forget oneself and work to benefit others (*mōgo rita* 忘己利他) as an example of how to live in a state of sincerity.¹⁶ Only through overcoming attachment to the self can one be understood as living in sincerity.

Tied to the teaching of sincerity is that of interdependence. People must realize that they are part of a larger group and, therefore, dependent on those around them. To explain, Hagami draws on his experience in the *kaihōgyō* and describes the annual summer retreat for *kaihōgyō* practitioners called the *geangyō* 夏安居 (HAGAMI 1997, pp. 39–40). A practitioner has not officially completed his practice until he attends this retreat. There he is recognized by his peers and reports his success to Sōō, the legendary founder of the *kaihōgyō*. This ritual is meant to remind practitioners that the individual practice of *kaihōgyō* is still dependent on a larger group that includes those who have been through it before and those who will attempt it in the future. This creates a sense of interdependence and humility vis-à-vis other practitioners. Practitioners are

16. *Mōgo rita* appears in the Saichō's *Sangegakushōshiki* 山家学生式.

also encouraged to develop this sense of interdependence with their lay support groups.¹⁷ The implication is that even “living Buddhas” must accept that they are a part of and dependent on society, and be thankful.

Linked to the teaching of interdependence we find that Hagami stresses the positive function of role models. The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (Jōfukyō bosatsu 常不經菩薩, the central figure in Chapter Twenty of the Lotus Sutra) serves as a role model for practice. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is said to have seen Buddha nature within everyone he encountered, and to have venerated all he saw as Buddhas. Hagami remarks that it is therefore imperative to not just respect all people, but to venerate them (HAGAMI 1997, p. 69). He relates the story of a man who came to see him on occasion. The man bowed properly, which moved Hagami. The man’s mother, Hagami tells us, took him daily to a shrine to make offerings and taught him through her words and actions how to behave respectfully (HAGAMI 1997, p. 143).¹⁸ In Hagami’s view, the job of those further along the path, be they parents, teachers, or priests, is to instill in others proper behavior through exemplary practice.¹⁹

Believing that which has survived the test of time is a proven good, Hagami teaches his readers a way of life and pride in tradition. He defends temple Buddhism against those who would see it as backwards or moribund. He emphasizes “traditional” Japanese character, including “come-what-may” determination, as especially pertinent in today’s world. He also encourages readers to avoid exclusivistic practices, such as those offered by the new religions. People must instead seek out inclusivistic practices (Tendai), and recognize their own dependence on those around them. Finally, Hagami warns that Japan needs to re-educate its youth to give them a firm, unified (Buddhist) faith, one that will provide the grounding from which to secure their (Japan’s) future.

Sakai Yūsai: Background

Sakai Yūsai was born in Osaka in 1926, the eldest son among eleven siblings. His father ran a rice and vegetable shop, which failed. At age five Sakai moved with his family to Tokyo, and at eighteen he joined an army air force suicide squadron (*yokaren* 予科練). After World War II, he held a variety of jobs, including running a noodle shop with his father that burned down. He married at age thirty-two, but his wife left him after one month and, after a short period together again, committed suicide. His aunt took him to Mt. Hiei to seek relief

17. Lay support groups provide funding for the practitioners, donate material goods, and participate in portions of the practice such as the *Kyōto omawari* in which they help direct traffic, plan meetings with local lay believers, and the like.

18. That man was from Suntory, one of Japan’s largest beverage companies (beer, whiskey, soft drinks), and a major sponsor of the Tendai sect.

19. This is the *gekeshujō* practice noted on page 261.

from his suffering. Though he claims to have not thought much of it at the time, later he walked there himself from Osaka, and stayed. He was ordained in 1965 at the age of thirty-nine. He completed his first *kaihōgyō* in 1980, and his second in 1987 at the age of sixty-one. After completing his second *kaihōgyō* he began a series of pilgrimages around Japan. He also made pilgrimages in China, Italy, Spain, and Cambodia.

SAKAI ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

According to Sakai, Japan is facing a crisis of the heart and mind. Until the Japanese learn resolve, re-establish community ties, and completely renew their educational system, the country will continue its downward spiral. The healing process for Japan, Sakai remarks, will take over a century, and if it does not begin soon, Japan will decline so far as to be beyond any hope of revival. People “must have this sense of danger,” he declares (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 79).

Connecting the healing of Japan to his own experiences during the *kaihōgyō*, he goes on to say that in practice (*gyō 行*) it is said that it takes three times as long for an injury to heal as it does for it to occur. “In the same way, if we consider that it has been over fifty years since the end of the war and that during that time the country has fallen into disrepair, then in order to restore things to how they were in the past, it will take three times as long as that, or one-hundred-and-fifty years” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 68). Echoing Hagami, Sakai believes the healing process will require a complete overhaul of the education system, a return to strong family and community ties, and the invigoration of a spiritless salaryman class.

According to Sakai, the extended recession in Japan has drained Japan’s workers of their will to continue and made them apathetic. Round after round of layoffs in a society where layoffs were not supposed to happen (at least not to the white-collar workers) have left Japan’s salarymen timid. Responding to a dramatic increase in the number of suicides among middle-aged men, Sakai states “Life isn’t something you throw aside just because things aren’t going well now” (NAKAO 2000, p. 59). He urges them not to dwell on the present, to look instead to the promise of tomorrow. While this might be construed as emphasizing goal over process in contradistinction of Hagami’s views, Sakai is not asking salarymen to focus on a distant goal when he urges them to look to tomorrow. He is instead asking them to see their present situation as part of a longer on-going process. Those who have been laid off “are too wrapped up in what is directly in front of them. They think only about what their rank and salary should be, when they should just go out and take any work that is available” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 17). Their pride and narrow understanding of what working is about (material gain, which is something Sakai believes one should be grateful for and learn from), he hints, is a stumbling block to moving forward. “I have this to say to salarymen: just let it be. Don’t dilly-dally about in your current circumstances, grasp the real situation, and

keep moving forward” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 19). Today’s salarymen, Sakai fears, over-emphasize past accomplishments, school records, and qualifications. “Don’t get wrapped up in what you have been up to now,” he advises. “Suck in your gut and live your life to the best of your abilities” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 19).

The picture of dejected salarymen that Sakai paints is powerful, but in his view they are more symptom than cause. The cause of Japan’s decline is more directly related to a collapse in ethics. It is clear that Sakai sees this collapse as having started in the aftermath of World War II. He states, “After the war people have come to think only of money” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 45). While Sakai clearly finds selfishness a problem, unlike Hagami and many conservative commentators who place the blame squarely on the introduction of Western values, such as individualism, or the elimination of religious education from the school system, Sakai links the postwar collapse in values to the hardships people underwent in the immediate postwar period. Income was hard to come by, food was scarce, and life in the cities was a day-to-day struggle for many. Sakai states that, because of the difficult times they experienced, many parents sought to give their children whatever they asked for. This was gradually made possible by the economic boom that extended through the fifties and sixties. Sakai worries, however, that, “when those children grow up they lose the sense of gratitude towards things. Kids raised like that are now becoming adults” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 46).

Sakai also points to the weakening of community ties as a reason for the decline in ethics in postwar Japan. “If you were to mention duty and human feeling (*giri ninjō* 義理人情) in today’s society you would probably be laughed at” (NAKAO 2000, p. 129). *Giri ninjō*, Sakai suggests, develops and is maintained through neighborly interaction. As urban life shifted away from the long houses he remembers from his youth—in which neighbors would pop in to borrow salt, look after each other’s children, and generally have a high degree of contact—to large-scale apartment complexes (*danchi*), interaction between neighbors ceased. “In the box-like apartments today that kind of interaction does not exist. If horizontal bonds disappear, the world is bound to grow crazy” (NAKAO 2000, p. 129). As part of this large-scale architectural assault on community bonds, Sakai also sees the advent of individual rooms for children as an attack on family bonds. Furthermore, he notes that the competitive school entrance examination system has created a society in which individuals are encouraged to look out for themselves, placing the bonds of friendship behind the individual’s desire for personal (material) success (NAKAO 2000, p. 130). Taken together, the emphasis on personal gain and the weakening of horizontal community and family ties have led to a decline in ethics in Japan. Referring to a series of political and business scandals Sakai states, “There has been an explosion [in the number] of incidents that make you think ethics have been lost” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 47).

Like Hagami, Sakai places his hopes for the regeneration of Japan on the

education of the youth. He also places much of the blame for what has gone wrong up to now on the educational system.

It is not good enough to simply look at what is right in front of oneself and judge whether or not something went well. I believe that the various problems that have arisen are because, from the end of the war until now, we have not learned to look at things comprehensively.... [Postwar] education has not served to comprehensively broaden individuality to give people something that they can hold up and say, "In this, I will lose to no one." ...Because they have not had a complete education people feel uneasy, thinking "I can't do anything."
(SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 76–77)

Sakai believes there is a crushing need for restructuring the educational system so that far-viewing, well-trained individuals are produced. "If Japan cannot engage in a human resources education that leads to Japanese being needed around the world, then it will not survive" (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 78). Unlike Hagami, restoring religious education to the classroom is not on Sakai's agenda. Sakai seeks a complete overhaul of the education system in order to foster individual talent and, thereby, rebuild Japan's economy.

Rather than supporting the current educational system with its emphasis on producing pliable workers ready to fit into the company, Sakai takes a line of argument similar to many who are seeking to reform Japan's ailing educational system including the Ministry of Education, Cultural, Sports, Science and Technology.²⁰ He argues for emphasizing and nurturing individual capabilities over uniform training. In his view, this type of education must begin from very early on.

Regarding education from here on, we must put into place an education system that seeks to foster the uniqueness (*kosei o nobasu* 個性を伸す) of children from a young age. Particularly in the case of Japan, which is becoming an aging society in which there are fewer and fewer young people, in order to be on par with the rest of the world, it is important to implement an education that gives life to the special talents of each individual. When you look at a country like China with its massive population, in order for Japan to be a big player in the world (*tachi mochi shite* 太刀持ちして), each and every Japanese must become someone with a special talent. (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, pp. 68–69)

Sakai seeks to create workers who will drive Japan's economic engine and assure Japan's survival. Sakai's views on specific education reforms differ from those of Hagami, but their goal remain the same. They are conservative goals that tend to underscore those of the state.

In order for this type of education to work, Sakai feels that there must be close

20. See, for example, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's White Paper (MONBUKAGAKUSHŌ ed., 2001).

cooperation between the family and the school. He draws on his experience as a Tendai priest to describe what is necessary. “Within our practice is something called *jōgyō sanmai* 常行三昧, and within that is *shin kū i* 身口意, or body, speech and mind. Success occurs when these three are in harmony. When I think about education I see it in the same way as this *shin kū i*, namely; child, parent and school or teacher must become one” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 72).

Sakai describes an educational plan in which parents watch their children closely, note any specific talents they might have, and relate those to the kindergarten or elementary school teachers who then design a curriculum suited to inspire the children to develop their unique talents to the fullest. To waste these talents is to deprive the nation of their potential and the individual of fulfilling his or her promise. Believing that children are the nation’s treasure (NAKAO 2000, p. 85), Sakai writes, “People are born because the Buddha has given them each a special talent. Most people go through life without ever discovering that talent. Life’s practice is finding one’s life path through the leaves and branches. Finding the root, entering from there, and persistently heading down that path” (NAKAO 2000, pp. 59–60).

For Sakai, education plays a crucial role, not just in saving the country from economic ruin but, at a more primary level, in allowing individuals to realize their true nature. Once they grasp their Buddha-given talent they will be able to proceed down their unique path in life and fulfill their purpose.

In sum, Sakai believes that contemporary Japan is mired in a swamp of materialism in which individual desires are seen as more important than national or community needs. Nevertheless, he remains hopeful that if the Japanese return to an emphasis on horizontal community and family bonds, and if they pursue educational reform with the intent of allowing each individual to give full play to his or her Buddha-given talent, then Japan will recover from its postwar ethical decline and regain its position as an important world power. Here we see tension in Sakai’s teachings between his belief in the powerful emotional and moral support roles of community and his desire to educate unique individuals. This tension may be resolved if we turn our attention to Sakai’s hopes for creating a Japan capable of surviving into the twenty-first century. Sakai can be understood as advocating the importance of individuality but not at the expense of the larger community. Individuals are not encouraged to seek after their own gain, but are to apply their unique gifts and school-honed talents to the restoration of Japan.

SAKAI ON PRACTICE: “LIVE EACH DAY AS IF IT WERE YOUR WHOLE LIFE”

Sakai recommends practices that directly address problems in contemporary society, such as the emotional and moral weakness he believes plagues salarymen. Foremost among his teachings is an emphasis on living each day as if it

were one's whole life. This and his emphasis on persistence are clearly derived from his *kaihōgyō* experience. He also teaches the importance of empathy (*omoiyari*) and gratitude (*kansha*), and emphasizes the significance of role models.

Like Hagami, Sakai addresses the salarymen of Japan. "I really want to tell the lethargic managers and mid-ranked administrators that, 'each day is your whole life.' Even if you failed today, you can still try hard tomorrow. At any rate, instead of doing nothing and just sitting about lifeless, try everything that you can. It won't hurt to have some samurai spirit" (SAKAI and Kō 2003, p. 24). His teaching to "live each day as if it was your whole life," is not a call to live each day as if there was no tomorrow, but rather a call to try one's best each day. "If there is something you don't like [remember that] today's self ends today and try again tomorrow" (SAKAI and Kō 2003, p. 22). Drawing from his own experience of the *kaihōgyō*, Sakai reminds his readers that the focus of each day must be on getting through that day's practice. Any practitioner who dwells on their practice and what lies ahead that day or on the pain they are suffering that day, will never be able to complete the long journey. Practitioners must see themselves as being reborn each day. Each morning as they leave their temples to circumambulate the mountain they don white clothing, representing their death to the world. Sakai also draws on his other life experiences. Evoking the human touch that helps readers identify with him, he relates that he used to feel the first forty years of his life were wasted, a life spent bouncing from job to job. But looking back now he sees those experiences as preparing the way for his practice on Mt. Hiei (NAKAO 2000, pp. 58–59). In a similar manner, salarymen who have lost their jobs should not view their life as a waste but learn from their past and move forward.

Sakai's views, born of practice, can be seen as somewhat anti-intellectual though they are not necessarily anti-canonical. "In Buddhist Studies they do a variety of difficult things. But for someone like me, who comes from an awareness developed through practice, practice is living each day as though it were your whole life" (NAKAO 2000, p. 67). Though basing his ideas on his personal experience and legitimating his teaching by the example of his present dramatic success, he also intimates that his teachings can be found within classical doctrines.

There is a teaching of Dengyō Daishi's (Saichō) called *isshin sangan* 一心三觀.²¹ There are a lot of difficult ways of understanding this, but it means things like obtaining simultaneous understanding of the three truths. The more I think about it, though, the more confused I get, so if people ask what *isshin sankan* is I tell them it is understanding nature just as it is. When you hurt, hurt. When you are sad, be sad. Death is waiting for all who are born.

21. *Isshin sangan* is drawn from the Chinese T'ien-t'ai text *Mo ho chih kuan*.

It's about being able to accept such a reality just as it is. Sincerely know yourself just as you are. (NAKAO 2000, p. 75)

Here, in order to further explain his teaching of living each day as if it was one's whole life, Sakai draws briefly on Saichō and the concept of *isshin sankan*, only to state how difficult explicating such a teaching is and then switch to his own practical knowledge of it. Sakai, thus, draws on classical Tendai thought to give depth and legitimacy to the idea of living each day as if it was one's whole life. By claiming intellectual ignorance but physical understanding gained from his practice, he validates his teaching and hints that those with intellectual knowledge alone cannot truly understand.

Sakai believes that the teaching of living each day as if it was one's whole life is connected to an understanding of the "true" nature of things. Only through sincerity, through being open to accepting things as they are in each situation, can one truly live each day as if it was one's whole life. Accepting this leads to feelings of gratitude. Recounting his feelings at looking at the sunrise over Lake Biwa he states, "I don't know how to describe it but it is like life is a stage and when this happens feelings of gratitude just pour forth of their own accord" (NAKAO 2000, p. 105).

The concept of living each day as if it was one's whole life forms the framework for the rest of Sakai's teachings. The practice he recommends most often within this framework is persistence. Persistence leads to a sense of accomplishment and to practical benefits such as advancement in the workplace, fresh ideas, mental clarity, and so on. He gives his own teachings, derived from his persistent walking, as an example. "The heart of what I talk about comes from things I realized as I was walking and which I never forgot" (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 99).

The value of persistence is in realizing that practice, and its benefits, can be found within everyday life. "It doesn't matter what, just find something and stick to it, that is practice (*shugyō* 修行)" (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 102). Sakai stresses that this practice could be anything, even the simple task of greeting officemates every morning, without fail, with "Good Morning." He also recommends persistence to retirees. "If you sit there watching TV, especially period pieces (*jidai geki*), you'll go senile in a flash" (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, pp. 118–19). Instead he recommends that they find something they excel at and stick to it.

To persistence Sakai adds empathy (*omoiyari*), compassion, gratitude, and sincerity.

The world today is one in which there is no empathy, or feeling of gratitude, there are no bonds holding people together. There is no way that politics or the economy can go well in such an environment.... I want to tell people living today to live with empathy and compassion. The reason why Japan today has gone off kilter (*okashiku natta*) is that these have been lost.

(SAKAI and KŌ 2003, pp. 45, 52)

These attitudes are drawn from his practice but also are clearly part of the “traditional values” that Sakai and many others wish to see returned to practice. Sakai views the goal of practice as making these values a lived reality. “It may be the ideal that people possess empathy and a compassionate heart, together with sincerity, but making this ideal a reality is necessary. In Buddhism, making this ideal a reality is called practice (*shugyō*)” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 52).

Like Hagami, Sakai does not believe that Japan can recover without these values in place. It is through example that such values are taught.

In Buddhism, because as a practice we constantly repeat the same action, people think “That’s incredible!” or “He’s really doing something I could never do.” My practice has been successful if people who see me practicing think to themselves, “That priest is doing all that. I’m being too easy on myself. Should I go on like this? Maybe I can change myself?” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 102)

Here Sakai cites himself as an example. He reports elsewhere that the most basic exemplars are the parents. But he does not limit his search for exemplars to parents. He states that children, too, can be teachers. Indeed, citing the famous swordsman Musashi, he states, “Even a blade of grass can be your teacher” (SAKAI and KŌ 2003, p. 54). The point is that the world is full of potential role models, one must simply become aware this.

In summary, Sakai purposefully avoids scholarly debate, lending his teachings a down-to-earth feel that, quite probably, appeals to his readers. His practice—living each day as if it was one’s whole life, persistence, empathy, gratitude, and so on—is legitimized through his personal success. Sakai’s teachings, drawn from his practice, are very similar to those of Hagami, especially as regards the emphasis on perseverance. Where the two begin to differ is in Sakai’s insistence on the importance of developing unique individuals, though as I explained above, Sakai does not abandon awareness of interdependence. Sakai’s use of samurai examples is useful here. The popular image of the samurai is twofold. On the one hand, the samurai is representative of Sakai’s unique individual. He is someone, like Musashi, who is dedicated to honing his talents and mastering his art. He is engaged in a very individualistic enterprise, much like the *kaihōgyō* practitioner. This image differs from Hagami’s portrait of an individual existing in a state of interdependence within a larger community. On the other hand, the samurai is often depicted as someone bound to a community, fiercely loyal to his lord, and willing to sacrifice everything for the greater good of the domain or nation. This image of the samurai is perhaps closer to Hagami’s views and also reflects Sakai’s hopes that individuals will act for the greater good. It is Sakai’s desire that his readers will take his teachings to heart and change for the better, thereby increasing the likelihood that Japan will “once again” prosper spiritually, ethically, and materially.

Michinaga Kakudō: Background

Born in 1954 in Yamagata city, Mitsunaga describes his childhood as rather uneventful. A loner throughout junior high school, he later went to a technical school where he studied mechanical engineering. Immediately following graduation he traveled to Mt. Hiei and was ordained at age twenty in 1975. He says that he was drawn to the priesthood because of the freedom he felt it offered. He claims that in the secular world of his salaryman contemporaries, once hired by a company one's whole life was mapped out, whereas as a priest one never knew what role one might play (MITSUNAGA 1996, pp. 51–53).

MITSUNAGA ON CONTEMPORARY JAPAN: “SAD JAPANESE”

Mitsunaga was born and raised in the postwar economic boom. His writings address the salarymen who represent the secular ideal of that period and whom Mitsunaga sees as being caught on a dangerous path of self-indulgence. Mitsunaga argues that a “return” to a religious moral foundation is necessary. Like Hagami, he states that with the loss of World War II came a repudiation of religion. State Shinto was associated with the war and dismantled. But the dismantling, it is argued, did not stop with State Shinto; it expanded to include a widespread undermining of any faith in religion or “traditional” Japanese values as a moral foundation (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 84–86). Titling a section of one of his books “Sad Japanese,” Mitsunaga writes that this sadness stems from the lack of a religious foundation on which to base their lives. In fact, according to Mitsunaga, Japan has contracted a “religion allergy” (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 161).

Religion is at the root of each person's value system. However, the Japanese swept all religion from their daily lives when the war was lost. This is because State Shinto, the key element in the value system put forth as a guiding ideology during the war, became equated with war and [thereby] “religion equated with [something] bad.”
(MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 84–85)

The loss of a unified value system resulted in a moral void into which numerous competing value systems rushed. “In short, various value systems such as ‘getting rich is good,’ or ‘becoming powerful is good,’ got all mixed together and deciding the value of each was simply entrusted to individuals” (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 84). The children of the bubble era, those born during Japan's booming economy when Japan seemed unstoppable, are particularly susceptible (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 74). They fail to understand that a moral foundation can provide an important emotional support system. “Young people have the image that relying on something like religion is uncool. They believe in themselves and live their own lives; religion is not providing support in their lives” (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 164). As long as they persist in the belief that

religion is an “old thing” for “old people,” Mitsunaga fears they will further distance themselves from a proper moral foundation.

Mitsunaga does not blame postwar religious education reform alone for the shallowness of the youth or the youths turning away from religion, but also places some responsibility on Buddhism which, he claims, became too theory-oriented and too separated from the reality of everyday life to have any meaning for contemporary Japanese. This is a great loss, he argues, because the Japanese, through enculturation, possess the “basic Buddhist way of thinking” (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 164–65). If only that foundation could be shaped and put into practice, he laments, Japan could recover from its moral collapse.

In the vacuum created by the removal of religion as a moral foundation, Mitsunaga writes that the Japanese came to rely completely on manuals.

There are few people who hold to their own convictions.... The number of “manual people” is rising. A large number of people, because they have had an education that judges them on a scale (*hensachi kyōiku* 偏差値教育), simply measure their own abilities on a scale. “I’ve gotten to here,” they think. They limit themselves to their academic records and where they fall on the scale. Therefore, since they have predetermined the limits of their abilities, even though they have strengths, they are unable to give them play.

(MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 33–34)

Mitsunaga feels that the Japanese educate their young by manuals, run their businesses by manuals, and order their lives as though based on manuals. Parents, he says, raise their children by the book and expect them to work out fine, and are rarely prepared for the consequences if they do not (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 54–55). The problem with “manual people,” he asserts, is that they never push beyond their school records and licenses (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 34).

According to Mitsunaga, having been raised in an ordered, “manual” world children have no will or values of their own, thus group values can easily take hold (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 57). He argues that one dangerous outcome of this is that many young people find the ordered world they were raised in within new religions, and thus join new religious movements, cults, and the like (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 162–63). New religions offer a well-defined, “manual-like” worldview through which the faithful can identify and solve their everyday problems. However, such religions, Mitsunaga critiques, do not allow for the growth of wisdom and faith.

Recently some new religions use the term “entering the faith” (*nyūshin* 入信). But, since faith is something that you do not swear to anyone other than yourself, I don’t really like the term. If there is the freedom to “enter the faith,” the opposite must also exist. Faith is not something to be forced; it should be within the realm of an individual’s free discretion.... In the end,

faith is a matter of an individual's own free discretion. Something forced upon one by another is not true faith. Having in the bottom of one's heart the desire to put one's hands together in supplication is faith.

(MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 95, 211)

He argues that faith should well up from within and, thus, assist one in finding self-confidence. Yet, forcing faith on others is exactly what he believes new religions do. Forced faith allows only false confidence (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 95, 171; and MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 211). Moreover, faith should put one's mind at ease and not cause discord within families (MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 225). But, Mitsunaga implies, some new religions end up creating discord within families. This rhetoric of discord as a critique of new religious movements is not uncommon and reflects the opinion of many within temple Buddhism in which the traditional family is the primary source of support for temple ritual, social, and financial life.

MITSUNAGA ON PRACTICE: FROM KNOWLEDGE TO WISDOM

Mitsunaga describes for his readers the practices that he believes will give them the foundation they need in life, without leading to discord. Here I describe the six practices he emphasizes most often: turning knowledge (*chishiki* 知識) into wisdom (*chie* 知恵), perseverance, controlling desire, developing awareness of the fact that one is given life by all those around oneself, gratitude (*kansha*), and people as mirrors.

Mitsunaga stresses throughout his writings the importance of turning knowledge into wisdom. This is a direct critique of the contemporary educational system and the “manual people” it produces. Turning knowledge into wisdom means internalizing and embodying information gathered through reading, studying, or daily life. He gives as an example the case of father and son. The father can teach the son about life, but until the son turns his father's teachings into wisdom through reflecting on his own experiences his father's words can be no more than simple knowledge (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 45). Practice (*shugyō*), he notes, is not simply the acquisition of knowledge, but turning that knowledge into wisdom through experience (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 182).

The foundation of “turning knowledge into wisdom” is the practice of maintaining a routine. This teaching reflects the nature of Mitsunaga's experience in the *kaihōgyō*, and his belief in the power of persistence. Mitsunaga states that practice is all about sticking to a routine and never wavering from it (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 5–8). Everyday must be seen as practice. Practice is not about maintaining one's current life-style but about advancing one step at a time (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 14). Mitsunaga offers the example of *mikkabōzu*, a common expression literally meaning three-day priest that refers to those who give up just a few days after beginning a new project. Mitsunaga turns this expression around by teaching that if one becomes a *mikkabōzu* every three days then one

can make great advances. In short, it is very difficult to relentlessly follow a routine over a long period of time in pursuit of a distant goal so people should think of routine in three-day segments—just as *kaihōgyō* practitioners are encouraged to focus on their next step and not on the distant goal of enlightenment (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 111–15).

The ability to properly manage oneself (*jiko kanri* 自己管理), that is, to know one's limits and thereby be able to push beyond them in a controlled fashion, is an important part of maintaining any routine, according to Hagami. He advises readers to know themselves and know their limits. For example, the ability to complete the *kaihōgyō* is in large part a matter of knowing how far one can push oneself without forcing a day to be missed. People should push themselves a little extra everyday. If one makes the extreme a part of everyday life, then when unexpected difficulties arrive one will be prepared and not overwhelmed.

It's only natural to be able to be strong when all the conditions are right. It's the same at work. When everything is prepared and ready, producing results is to be expected. However, it's not like there will always be perfect conditions. Since that's the case you should push yourself. Train so that you can produce good results even when the conditions are not very good. If you build up such experience, you will be able to confront even more difficult situations, and when the conditions are good your job will be easy.

(MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 127)

Through these practices self-confidence is built. Mitsunaga seeks to push people beyond the limits imposed upon them by their school records and qualifications.

Controlling one's desires must be part of any routine. Humans, Mitsunaga remarks, are incapable of complete denial of desire, but they can control it. "As long as we exist as humans, we cannot deny the three desires [sleep, eating and drinking, worldly pleasures]. Since they cannot be denied they must be controlled" (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 12). He states, for example, that the *dōiri* is a crucial part of *kaihōgyō* practice because it is a momentary total denial of all basic desires. The object of controlling them, Mitsunaga states, is to move closer to the Buddha, to a state of freedom from desire, and to, thus, move closer to one's true potential.

Mitsunaga notes that desire, when controlled and properly applied, can also be useful. Desire can be understood as the will to improve oneself, though this should not be equated with material gains according to Mitsunaga. He quotes Saichō's famous line, "within the will to enlightenment there is food and shelter, but within food and shelter there is not the will to enlightenment" (*dōshin no naki ni ejiki ari, ejiki no naka ni dōshin nashi* 道心の中に衣食あり, 衣食の中に道心なし). Mitsunaga puts this classical line into contemporary terms.²²

22. This can be found in the *Denjutsu issinkaimon*, a biography of Saichō written by his disciple, Kōjō (779–858). Tendai practitioners refer to it frequently. See, for example, the homepage of the Hieizan Enryakuji, www.hieizan.or.jp/enryakuji/econt/access/livetalk/.

[We are] given life as humans, each with our own abilities, therefore, we should do that which we have been allowed to do. Because we have been allowed to work we obtain compensation, so we shouldn't work grudgingly. That you can do all that you can to the best of your abilities while giving thanks to those around you is [the meaning of] "within the will to enlightenment there is food and shelter."
(MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 13–14)

He advises replacing "the will to enlightenment" with "work" and "food and shelter" with "paycheck." Thus, "within work there is a paycheck, but within a paycheck there is no work." In other words, work should not be about material gain, rather it should be taken on gratefully as an opportunity to improve oneself.

Mitsunaga emphasizes throughout his writings that people are given life by all those around them (*hito to hito no aida ni ikasareteiru* 人と人の間に生かされている), that is, they live interdependently. Thus, the most basic teaching, he says, is both the simplest and the most difficult; it is living with the awareness that life is a gift. "There are too many people living [as though] on their own. There are few who [live with the awareness that they] are given life. If the number of people who feel that they are given life would increase, things would change" (MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 229). Mitsunaga says that practice (*shugyō*) is a matter of slowly building up awareness that life is given, that is, that one lives not independently but interdependently. This is true for the *kaihōgyō* practitioner as well as the layperson. His sentiments resonate with those of Hagami which, we have seen, emphasize the individual's need to be grounded in the awareness of existing in an interdependent relationship others. Sakai stands out in placing far greater emphasis on the individual though he, too, seeks to place the individual within the context of supporting the family and community.

When one realizes that life is a gift, one should express gratitude to all. In particular, gratitude toward the past and toward one's ancestors is important (MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 219). "I often tell believers that when they put their hands together to pray, the foundation is the ancestors. Give thanks everyday to the ancestors... [this] is giving thanks for your own existence" (MITSUNAGA 1998, p. 167). Giving thanks builds merit. Merit, Mitsunaga explains, is like "a bank account." One's ancestors begin by making frequent deposits. The living can then draw upon this account of merit (MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 219). Thus, respecting one's ancestors, and, thereby, all that supports one's life, is a lesson in how to live properly through the return of debt, that is, through recognizing and respecting interdependence.

Even though you wake up today, there is no guarantee that when you go to bed tonight, you will wake up. You could be cold and dead the next morning. That we are able to go to sleep without a worry is, to me, a mystery. To wake-up and think "Ah! I am alive another day!" is how it really should be. Give thanks that you are alive and, think what you can do that day to repay the gift.

First, face your ancestors and give thanks that you are able to wake up and be there. Then, the rest of the day should be spent thinking how you can repay that gratitude. To give thanks to your ancestors and build up [merit] little by little each day is truly returning the debt of gratitude.

(MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 221)

Interdependence is not put forward in strict doctrinal terms of *pratītya samutpāda*, but in terms of ancestor veneration—a practice common to most religions in Japan including Buddhism, Shinto, many new religions, and even some forms of Christianity.

Coupled to the idea that one lives amongst and is given life by all those around one is the idea that people are mirrors in which one is reflected.

I tell everyone that just as they say that children are mirrors to their parents, so too all those one comes in contact with are your own mirrors. Therefore, if you give all your heart and try your best to communicate, you are sure to get a similar response. So, please lead a life in which you think of what you can do for others, not what others can do for you. Interact with others by trying to give all your heart and doing your best to communicate.

(MITSUNAGA 1996, p. 59)

Mitsunaga uses the parents who come to him seeking advice about their children as an example. Most parents seek advice because their child either failed to get into the right school, or dropped out part way through. He tells them that the child's problems cannot be completely the child's fault. The child's problems reflect trouble within the family. Often the problem is lack of communication, something he sees as occurring between husband and wife as well (MITSUNAGA 1998, pp. 53–55).

In sum, Mitsunaga seeks to teach Japanese today how to live more fulfilling, productive, and less troubled lives. The “manual people” of Japan must learn to go beyond their manuals and turn knowledge into wisdom. They must learn fortitude and resolve, and come to realize that they do not live alone but that they exist interdependently with others, and must be thankful for the gift of life and make their life an expression of that gratitude. Much like Hagami and Sakai's teachings, these teachings are very conservative in nature and only tend to support the status quo. Mitsunaga emphasizes getting away from manuals and a pre-programmed life course but, on the other hand, through his own self-help books, he seeks to instill conservative family and work values that would seem to do no more than support the very life he argues against.

Conclusion

Hagami, Sakai, and Mitsunaga clearly hold much in common. Regarding contemporary society they are unanimous in their opinion that postwar Japan suffers

from moral decline. The view that postwar Japan is a ship afloat without a moral rudder is by no means limited to them. It is a belief widely expressed by politicians, religious practitioners, social commentators and others. Ishihara Shintarō 石原慎太郎, for example, the outspoken and controversial mayor of Tokyo, begins his recent book, *Ima tamashii no kyōdoku* いま魂の教育 [Now is the time for education of the soul], with the following quote from Takada Kōin 高田好胤 the head priest of Yakushiji 薬師寺, “If things go on like they are, this country will be rich in material goods, but at loss for heart” (ISHIHARA 2001, p. 17). The publications of Tendai and other sects are also rife with warnings about the dire state of moral affairs in Japan. Yamada Etai, then head priest of Tendai, stated in 1986, “In the forty years since the war, young and old have been blessed as our country once again became a major economy. However, I dread the fact that, while people have material abundance, they have lost richness of heart and that this has led to a deepening and widening trend of turning their backs on morality and ignoring humanity” (TENDAISHŪMUCHŌ 2001, p. 210). In her work on the new religious movement Risshō Kōseikai, Ranjana MUKHOPADHYAYA, writes that founder Niwano Nikkyō (1906–1999) also makes reference to Japan as “materially rich” but “spiritually impoverished” (2000, p. 7).

Much as Ishihara Shintarō calls for an education of the soul, Hagami, Sakai, and Mitsunaga all place great value on education. Without exception, they critique the current educational system for failing to incorporate religious or moral values. In particular, Sakai and Mitsunaga are profoundly concerned about a system that relies on judging people on a scale and on earning specific qualifications that demark from early on what one might accomplish in life. Sakai specifically argues for an emphasis on the development of individual talents. Although they are critical, their primary desire appears to be the creation of a system that assures Japan’s global survival. They are not alone in this view. The Japanese government, too, has come to emphasize (in rhetoric if not in practice) an education that develops the talents of individuals. In this sense, Sakai and the others are putting forth a teaching about contemporary society that mirrors that of the government and seeks to do little to challenge the status quo sought by the government. This closely resembles the findings of Winston DAVIS (1992) regarding the manner in which the teachings of the new religions do little to challenge the conservative status quo but instead serve to support it.

Linked to their emphasis on moral decline is a shared interest in what are commonly accepted as “traditional Japanese values.” The greatest difference amongst the three on this point lies in Hagami’s openly nostalgic reflection on the prewar past and, in particular, his fondness for the emperor. His reflections on the past, however, in many ways mirror Mitsunaga’s view that it was the postwar removal of religion from education that led to moral collapse, and Sakai’s view that it will take over one hundred years to recover from the postwar decline in values. The work of Helen HARDACRE (1984, 1986) and others has

shown that the new religions, too, strongly emphasize “traditional” values such as diligence and sincerity—the very same values that are at the heart of the teachings of Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai.

This call for a “return” to so-called traditional Japanese values places Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai squarely within the broad public debate over Japanese character known as *Nihonjinron*, a form of argument that seeks to define the uniqueness of Japanese character. It can be understood in the contemporary period as an attempt to create or understand Japanese identity following the loss of the primary pre-war and wartime symbols of that identity; namely, the emperor system and the extended family (*ie* 家) (BEFU 2001). Their participation in this debate is evidence that Hagami, Sakai, and Mitsunaga are consciously tapping into a large vein of popular concern. Their teachings are aimed directly at what they perceive to be a postwar moral vacuum—an existential crisis facing all Japanese.

Their defense of tradition and call for a return to traditional values to ward off moral decline frames their worldview. There are differences in their writings though, in particular the weight Hagami places on defending temple Buddhism and attacking sectarianism. This difference can be explained by reference to the times at which they were writing. From the 1950s to the 1970s, when Hagami was training and writing his book, Temple Buddhism was undergoing major changes along with changes in population patterns and laws governing religious organizations. Also, traditional practices were under close public scrutiny for the role they played leading up to and during the war. Hagami’s writings speak directly to these early difficulties faced by temple Buddhism and especially are concerned with addressing the criticism of temple Buddhism as a traditional pre-war practice and value system.

Hagami and Mitsunaga are more in line with each other as regards their attitude towards new religious movements. During the first three decades following the war, when Hagami was most active, the new religions were growing dramatically. The new religions were seen as a direct threat to temple Buddhism. Mitsunaga, writing in the late 1990s, primarily after the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas incident and the rise of the Komeitō party (associated with Sōka Gakkai) to political power, was addressing a public concerned with the activities of new religions. He carries on Hagami’s attack on new religious movements by describing them as vessels of false faith.

Despite differences in emphasis, the teachings of Hagami, Sakai, and Mitsunaga are very similar. Stemming directly from their own practice and speaking to salarymen, they teach the need for perseverance or persistence. If the practice of perseverance is made routine, they proclaim repeatedly, people will be able to endure the rigors of daily life and continue to better themselves and society. Hagami and Mitsunaga also place great emphasis on understanding and embodying the idea of interdependence, while Sakai hints at it throughout his teachings. The self, they argue, is inextricably bound together with all other sentient (and

non-sentient) beings. Life, therefore, is to be understood as a gift born of and nurtured within the bonds of interdependence. Through living a sincere life, accepting one's circumstances while also striving for even deeper understanding of one's situation, one can realize one's Buddha nature or Buddha-given talents. Gratitude, which is a practice or attitude that is said to naturally develop from and further deepen one's understanding of interdependence, is also taught by all three. As discussed previously, the teachings of perseverance and interdependence do little to challenge the status quo, but instead enable people to accept and cope with their current situation. If anything, their teachings are a reactionary response to the rapid changes occurring in modern Japanese social relations.

The above examination of their teachings brings to light one conspicuous point. From the valuation of tradition to the teaching of interdependence and the emphasis on perseverance and gratitude their teachings are strikingly similar to the worldview of the new religions as described by Shimazono Susumu, Helen Hardacre, Winston Davis, and others. Like Hagami, Sakai, and Mitsunaga, the new religions often emphasize ancestor veneration, which is closely tied to the valorization of the traditional family (*ie*). They also stress what Ian Reader (1991, pp. 15–20) terms the “primacy of action.” This emphasis on a learn-through-practice approach is very similar to the manner in which Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai stress that people must get out and practice and not spend time overly analyzing or questioning their situation. Regarding practice, HARDACRE describes four “patterns of action” found within new religions: people as mirrors, gratitude and repayment of favor, striving for sincerity, and paths of self-cultivation (1986, pp. 21–28). Each of these can also be found in the teaching of the *kaihōgyō* practitioners. For example, “paths of self-cultivation” emphasizes learning through participation and through mimicking of role models. As we have seen, role models are especially important to the teachings of Hagami, Sakai, and Mitsunaga.

Tsushima Michihito and Shimazono Susumu point to the vitalistic concept of salvation as the essence of the worldview of the new religions, and we can also find this in the teachings of Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai. The vitalistic concept of salvation can be described briefly as follows: (1) the idea of a primary being that bears and nurtures all living beings, (2) confidence in the inherent goodness of the world, (3) exhortations to thank the deity for its bestowal of life, and (4) an optimistic view of salvation easily attainable in this world (TSUSHIMA et al., 1979, p. 129). I believe that we can find within Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai's teachings on interdependence, sincerity, and persistence (through which the benefits of practice can be realized in this life) a similar teaching. Within their teachings the Buddha, who is manifest in all through Buddha nature, can be seen as the “primary” source that is to be thanked and awakened to, or unified with. This teaching is also found in official Tendai sect pronouncements such as on the sect's website under “teachings” (*oshie* 教え),

where it states that Saichō “proclaimed that all people are the children of the Buddha” (www.tendai.jp/oshie/index.html). Moreover, Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai are clear in their view that this world is inherently good, that it is possible for people to attain salvation in this very world, and that people must live a life of gratitude. SHIMAZONO notes that it is the move away from merely emphasizing common moral values and toward this vitalistic concept of salvation, in which moral action is inextricably linked to a greater power, that spurred on the growth of many of the new religions (1982, pp. 163–64). Hardacre and others also have argued that it is this worldview of the new religions that is one of the main reasons for their popularity, and it is no doubt part of the reason for the popularity of the Hagami, Mitsunaga, and Sakai as well.

Given the similarities between their teachings and those of the new religions, the tenacity with which Hagami and Mitsunaga excoriate the new religions is all the more remarkable. Then again, Hagami and Mitsunaga do not attack the worldview of the new religions so much as their organization and history. The new religions are seen as divisive, whereas temple Buddhism is understood as open. The new religions are viewed as home breakers (splitting family-based religious affiliations), and as politically motivated (seeking secular power). Moreover, they are portrayed as enticing false faith and thus false confidence and hope.²³

Hagami and Mitsunaga’s condemnation of the new religions can be linked not to a disagreement over the need for spiritually-inspired traditional values as a moral foundation for contemporary Japanese, but to an emphasis on just who has the legitimacy necessary to teach such a worldview. The *kaihōgyō* practitioners emphasize history and experience as the key legitimizing factors. They believe that history has shown that the teachings of temple Buddhism, when embodied through practice, are effective. The new religions lack history and thus the test of time. The teachings of temple Buddhism, on the other hand are, to borrow from Hagami, “old but new” and, thus, “the real thing.”

Hagami, Sakai, and Mitsunaga apply a similar experiential test of authority to temple Buddhist doctrines as well. In a clear swipe at the intellectualism of sectarian studies, they downplay (but do not deny) the importance of textual study. They see physical practice—embodiment of the teachings, to paraphrase Mitsunaga’s knowledge into wisdom principle—as the measure of authority. They are not outright anti-intellectual (although Sakai’s admitted aversion to reading is close). Each one has gone through a significant amount of training in sectarian studies. They each maintain, however, that only through practice can the classical

23. This view of the new religions is in no way limited to Hagami and Mitsunaga. Indeed, the *Bukkyo Times* ran a series of articles entitled “The Basic Problems of Sōka Gakkai” in 2002. The temple-priest trade journal *Gekkan jūshoku (Jimon kōryū)*, too, frequently covers what its editors feel are the dangers of some new religions, Sōka Gakkai in particular.

teachings be truly understood. It is helpful to view them as representative of one faction within contemporary Tendai (and within contemporary temple Buddhism more broadly). They are the practitioner-monk (*shugyōsō* 修行僧) faction and stand in tension with the scholar-monk (*gakusō* 学僧) faction. In order to better understand the development of contemporary Japanese Buddhism we must begin to explore the various factions interacting within temple Buddhism today. Other factional dividing lines that share similarities across the sects of temple Buddhism include the on-mountain and off-mountain factions (those representing the sect headquarters and those representing small local temples), the Honzan (sect headquarters) and sect university factions, the lay-family background and the temple-family background factions, and the sectarian studies and the propagation factions. Each faction is in constant interaction with the others, and overlap often exists. This paper has sought to broaden our understanding of Japanese Buddhism by examining the teachings of one small faction representative of the popular teachings of contemporary Japanese Buddhism.

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