"I respect you deeply" (Trevor Murphy)

"I respect you deeply"

The Autobiography of Tsunawaki Ryūmyō (Part 11)

(translation and introductory note by Trevor Murphy)

"Reverent worship of one's fellow man"

I gradually progressed with the task of reading through the whole of

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1 Tsunawaki Ryūmyō 綱瀧龍妙 (1876-1970) was a priest of the Nichiren denomination of Buddhism in Japan; he founded a private leprosy hospital in Minobu, Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan in 1906, at the age of thirty. It is significant that this was the only Buddhist private leprosy hospital in Japan; all the others were set up by foreign Christian missionaries.

The events recorded in this Part 11 of Tsunawaki Ryūmyō's autobiography (his discovery of the story of 'The Never-despising Bodhisattva', his enrollment at the Nichiren denomination-affiliated school in Kyoto and his first visit to a Christian church) took place during his late teens and early twenties. It is interesting to consider how these events may have contributed to his later decision to undertake leprosy relief work.

The identity of the Christian speaker who appears in this Part 11 of Tsunawaki Ryūmyō's autobiography is, curiously, not mentioned until Part 13, where we learn that it was Ebina Danjō 海老名彈正 (1856-1937) and that the Zen master of his story is Hakuin Zenji 白隠禅師 (1685-1786), a renowned priest of the Rinzai denomination of Buddhism in Japan. Ebina Danjō must rank as a major influence on Tsunawaki Ryūmyō (this is backed up by interviews with Tsunawaki Ryūmyō's daughter Michi and by the frequent mentions of his name in Tsunawaki Ryūmyō's writings); it is reported that Ebina Danjō “believed that a creative rapprochement between Buddhism and Christianity was both possible and necessary” [A. Hamish Ion: The Cross and the Rising Sun Volume 2, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993, p.63] and it is perhaps this concept which impressed the young Tsunawaki Ryūmyō so much. It is known from his writings that Tsunawaki Ryūmyō was interested in this idea of a 'synthesis of religions'; he had particular hopes for a coming together of two of the largest Buddhist denominations in Japan, his own Nichiren denomination and the True Pure Land denomination.

Further details of Tsunawaki Ryūmyō's life and work may be found on the Japanese/English website <http://www.geocities.jp/tsunawakiryumyo/>.

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the Lotus Sutra, a combination of study and reverent prayer which I effected by reading, in order, a different chapter of the scripture at each of the temple parishioner's houses I visited.

It was the end of August 1894, just after the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War; I was eighteen years old. I had just finished Chapter 19, 'The Merits of the Great Teacher', and the parishioner's house whose turn coincided with the reading of the next chapter, Chapter 20, 'The Never-despising Bodhisattva', was that of Kawasaki Chūsaburō. It was a farmhouse with a thatched roof that lay on a curve in the Hokuriku Highway; the Kawasaki's might have been said to be one of the poorer families of the village.

All members of the household were out weeding the rice fields so there was nobody at home, but they knew someone would be coming

2 The Lotus Sutra 離法経 (Lotus Sutra) is an abbreviation of the full title 'Sutra of the Lotus of the Supreme Law' 本法華経 (Sutra of the Lotus of the Supreme Law), which contains 28 chapters, is the sutra worshipped by followers of the Nichirei denomination of Buddhism in Japan, to which Tsunawaki Ryūmyō belonged.

3 The Japanese here is 高向, meaning merit-transference, the process whereby the good deed of reading the scriptures counts as a meritorious action not just for Tsunawaki Ryūmyō himself but is dedicated to all living beings.

4 The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 日清戦争 was fought to establish Japanese dominance in the Korean Peninsula; Japan, victorious, was awarded financial compensation and the island of Taiwan under the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki.

5 The action here is set in Fukui Prefecture, one of four prefectures (Niigata, Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui) that comprise the Hokuriku region (北陸地方) of Japan.
from the temple to read the scriptures, so candles were duly set in the Buddhist altar. I sat down in front of the Buddhist altar and, making my customary apology that although this was for my personal study I did also mean it to be an act of worship before the Buddha, I began to read the chapter entitled 'The Never-despising Bodhisattva'.

And what should take place as I gradually progressed with the reading? My whole body began to shake with a peculiar sensation, the like of which I had never experienced before and which I became unable to control. Amidst this intense emotion and enveloped in feelings of surprise and joy I focused all of my energy on continued reading.

Long, long ago there came into the world a Buddha of infinite divine wisdom called Ionnō-nyorai, who, through his Buddhist teachings and guidance in all the ways of civilization, was able to build in this world a great Buddhist land.

6 A Buddhist altar (butsudan 仏壇) can be found in the homes of most Japanese families.
7 The Japanese here is again ekō 回向; see Note 3.
8 On this occasion, Tsunawaki Ryūmyō was reading the Lotus Sutra in its long-hand Japanese version (kundoku 訓読), rather than in the much denser (and less readily comprehensible) Chinese character verse form. It is not clear when the original Sanskrit text of the Lotus Sutra came into existence (one theory proposed by Nakamura Hajime suggests the period 40-220); however, it is known that six translations from the original Sanskrit into a Chinese character verse form were made at various times. Of the three surviving versions, it is the one completed in 406 by Kumarajū (344-413), a Buddhist missionary of Indian descent who came to China in 401, that is most widely used in Japan today.
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In the course of time, following the death of this Buddha, when the ‘righteous law’ period had passed and it was already coming to the end of the ‘imitative law’ period, Buddhism became concerned with formalities and theory, and priests, puffed up with pride, did not engage in any genuine ascetic practices, merely toyed around with theoretical and academic pursuits. The general populace were the same too, and society had come to be in a lamentable condition.

However, amidst all that, there appeared out of the blue (nobody knows quite where from) a rather unusual (some might say strange) monk, who would stand at the crossroads in the town, turn to anybody

9 Ionnō-nyorai is made up of two parts. Ionnō (pronounced I-on-nō) might be considered a proper name; nyorai 如来, with essentially the same meaning as Buddha, indicates someone who has come from nyo 如, or the state of absolute truth. The Chinese translators struggled with 'absolute truth', since the usual word for truth (shin 真) immediately implies the existence of its opposite, untruth (fushin 不真), thus rendering the term relative rather than absolute. They eventually chose nyo, which has been translated into English by Suzuki Daisetsu variously as 'suchness', 'thusness' or 'as-it-is-ness'.

10 Many Buddhists believe that three periods can be identified after the historical Buddha's death in BC 383, during which a gradual deterioration in religious (and by consequence secular) standards takes place. This view was also an important feature of Tsunawaki Ryūmyō's particular Buddhist faith. During the first period, which is called the 'righteous law' (shōbō 正法) period, we find that the Buddhist teachings, practices and enlightenment are all in existence. By the second period, called the 'imitative law' (zōbō 像法) period, there is no longer any enlightenment. In the third period, the 'last law' (mappō 末法) period, only the teachings remain. And after that, even the teachings themselves disappear. There are various theories as to the starting point and duration of the three periods; according to one theory, the 'righteous law' period lasts for the 500 years from BC 383 to 116, the 'imitative law' period for the following 1,000 years from 117 to 1116, and the 'last law' period for the 10,000 years after that.

11 See Note 10.
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who happened to pass by, whether they be priest or layman, join his hands in prayer and begin reverently to worship them, saying: "I respect you deeply, not daring to make light of you in any way; the reason is this; if you follow the path of the Bodhisattva, it is certain you can all become a Buddha." The meaning is this. 'You are all persons of great value. With the self-awareness that comes through just a little religious training, you are to become a Buddha. I ask you to please follow the practices of the Bodhisattva.'

However, those that were being worshipped by the monk, did not get his meaning and did not want anything to do with him. "Hey, you idiot! We're not such sinful people as to merit a lecture in Buddhism from some beggar monk like you!" More than just not having anything to do with him, they actually gave him a really rough time, striking him with sticks and hurling stones and roof tiles at him. However, this monk did not get angry at all. He just kept on praying and praying and worshipping people, becoming ever kinder and saying: "This is the fruit of my efforts." And so it was that people gave him the nick-

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12 In Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is a person who is seeking enlightenment (Buddhahood) not only for themselves but for others; although worthy of Buddhahood, they delay this in order to save others. Bodhisattvas are able to attain enlightenment through six practices [in Japanese ropparimitsu 六波羅蜜 or rokudo 六度] (i 'giving' fuse 布施; ii 'keeping the religious precepts' jikai 持戒; iii 'enduring sufferings' ninniku 忍辱; iv 'striving hard' shōjin 精進; v 'meditating' zenjō 禪定; vi 'attaining wisdom' chie 智慧 or hannya 般若). The sixth practice, attaining wisdom, is considered the most important, and the first five practices are preparatory stages in achieving it. It is this perfect wisdom attained which manifests itself as compassion for the suffering of others.
name ‘The Never-despising One’.

‘The Never-despising One’ continued to worship people thereafter for many decades until finally he fell ill and was on his deathbed; it was then that a voice from the sky resounded in his ears, reciting twenty quadrillion verses of the Lotus Sutra as had been preached to him previously by Ionno-nyorai. And what do you think should happen? The illness that had afflicted ‘The Never-despising One’ was instantaneously cured and at the same time he achieved the state in which the six sense organs of the body all become purified and free from attachment allowing a heightened level of functioning; he also gained supernatural powers, oratory skills such that, if one listened to him speaking one could not help but be persuaded, and the looks and personal magnetism of a kind that charmed all those that he met. That is to say he had become ‘The Never-despising Bodhisattva’.

Thereafter ‘The Never-despising Bodhisattva’ traveled far and wide spreading the Buddha’s teachings, and it came as a great surprise to both the haughty priests and the laymen that (the monk whom they had named) ‘The Never-despising One’ (and) whom they had until now so cruelly persecuted like some hairy caterpillar had become transformed in this way as if into a swallowtailed butterfly, and they be-

13 The six sense organs (in Japanese rokkon 六根) allow consciousness of the six senses of vision, audition, smell, taste, touch, and intellectual activity. The state of heightened functioning of the six sense organs (in Japanese rokkon-shōjō 六根清浄) might correspond to achievement of perfect union with the truth.
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lieved and followed all the teachings of the Lotus Sutra preached by this bodhisattva; and, as might be expected, the corrupt and demoralized society got itself back on the right course and there was a return to the Buddhist land of old.

(The historical Buddha) Śākyamuni, who preached the above (story of 'The Never-despising Bodhisattva', to an audience of 1,500), continued further with the following words. "This 'Never-despising Bodhisattva' is none other than I, Śākyamuni, in a previous life. Although I did my share of reading the sutra texts I wasn't just engaged in reciting such Buddhist scriptures but was ever worshipping and praying to my fellow human beings. By putting into practice this 'reverent worship of one's fellow man' I was able to become a nyorai (Buddha) and I was able to bring about an epochal awakening and create a society informed by Buddhist principles. One does not readily encounter the Lotus Sutra, and to get an opportunity to actually listen to somebody relate the true teachings of the Lotus Sutra is even harder still, so that you really must listen intently now with all your heart and soul and then go forth into society to spread what you have learned." Thus did Śākyamuni patiently urge those present.

On reading this story of 'The Never-despising Bodhisattva', I became

14 The story of 'The Never-despising Bodhisattva' (as written in Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra) relates that the monk ('The Never-despising One') was not in the habit of reciting Buddhist scriptures and engaged solely in the worship of his fellow man.

15 See Note 9.
engulfed in a boundless feeling of religious ecstasy that could only, I think, be called ‘divine inspiration’. I came to the firm belief that it was this very act of ‘reverent worship of one’s fellow man’ as performed by ‘The Never-despising Bodhisattva’ which was truly the path I ought to tread and that it was in this that the course of my life lay. And so was determined that immovable sense of peace which I felt. I was eighteen years old.

A midday snooze in Kyoto

A number of other events occurred around that time. Construction of the bell tower for Myōtaiji temple got under way and this was completed in the following year, 1895. A further year later, in 1896, having completed the military conscription test, I was instructed by my mentor to go and do some study at the school run by our denomination; and so I moved away from Myōtaiji temple and entered Matsugasaki ‘Shō-danrin’ (the Nichiren denomination-affiliated junior high school) in Kyoto.

Up until then I had in a sense been entirely self-taught and it could

16 Tsunawaki Ryūmyō failed the military conscription test on medical grounds.
17 Tsunawaki Ryūmyō is referring here to Nukina Nichiryō, head priest of Myōtaiji 妙泰寺 temple, who adopted him as an apprentice at the age of fifteen. The Japanese used is shishō 師匠.
18 ‘Shō-danrin’ 小檀林, situated in Matsugasaki 松ヶ崎, was the name of the Nichiren denomination-affiliated junior high school in Kyoto. Students who successfully completed the four-year course at ‘Shō-danrin’ were eligible to progress to the five-year course offered by ‘Chū-danrin’ 中檀林, the Nichiren denomination-affiliated senior high school, also in Kyoto.
not be said that my situation had been favourable with regards to learning; nevertheless, through hard work, I had in my own way come to understand the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and felt that, having come upon the chapter concerning ‘The Never-despising Bodhisattva’, I had at least got to a stage of achieving some kind of true sense of peace. However, as one who had never come under the instruction of an academic teacher, I had great hopes for my studies. So, my feeling of delight and sense of anticipation on being given the opportunity to go to Kyoto and be taught by persons of eminence were both considerable.

However, it turned out that these expectations of mine for the eager pursuit of learning were spectacularly betrayed. What the teachers at the ‘Danrin’ (Nichiren denomination-affiliated school) were teaching was far removed from what I was looking for, and there was not the least element of seriousness in the attitude of the pupils with whom I was studying. And as I gradually got to know the internal workings of the head temple and so on, these too turned out to be in a rather disgusting condition.

Not wishing to put up with such a tedious place for even a moment, I left the school and went to Enmyōin temple in Fukagusa to discuss the matter with a fellow member of the denomination who was my

19 The Japanese word honzan 本山 is used here; it refers to the headquarters of the Nichiren denomination of Buddhism, situated in Minobu, Yamanashi Prefecture, but also indicates the organizational hierarchy of the denomination.
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guarantor.

“What’s the matter? Has something happened?” he asked, on viewing my aspect of pent-up unvented anger. I told him how, contrary to my expectations, the 'Danrin' (Nichiren denomination-affiliated school) in Kyoto had proved to be an absolutely dismal place and continued: “I had no idea Kyoto would be this dull. I think that in such a boring place as this I will make no progress no matter how hard I study. If this is the way it's going to be, I might just as well go back to the countryside and study on my own.”

This guarantor was both a considerable academic and also a man not unfamiliar with the troubles of this life.

“I see. And I can quite understand what you say. I expect that your high level of enthusiasm has left you feeling all the more let down.

“But, young Tsunawaki, it is sometimes the case that ‘even a midday snooze in Kyoto is better than the academy of the countryside’. Try and put up with things for just a little while longer; in the course of your patient hard work there is sure to be something or other that will prove instructive for you.”

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20 ‘Tsunawaki-kun’ is the form of address adopted by the guarantor; the suffix ‘-kun’ 君, although used here as an expression of familiarity, does also indicate Tsunawaki Ryūmyō’s lower status with respect to his guarantor.
And on account of these intently spoken words, I gave the matter some reconsideration and decided to persevere.

At last having regained some composure I resumed my attendance at the school, but there was no change in either the slovenly mood of the 'Danrin' (Nichiren denomination-affiliated school) or the attitude of the teachers which, although difficult to put your finger on, could best be described as feeble, and my sense of disillusion only deepened. Nevertheless, study was one thing which I did not neglect; to this I gave my full attention. .......

[There follows a passage describing some of the pleasurable Sunday walks that Tsunawaki Ryūmyō made around Kyoto during this period of his life (he was enrolled at the 'Shō-danrin' Nichiren denomination-affiliated junior high school from around October 1896, when he joined half-way through the third year of the four-year course, to his graduation at the end of March 1898).]

A Christian speech

As I mentioned earlier I was disappointed in the school but did at least attend diligently to my studies. Among my classmates was a friend by the name of Noguchi Tomotaka who was an apprentice priest at a temple called Muryōji in Tokushima, Awa; here was a man who genuinely took his studies seriously and although he was two years my junior, I treated him as a brother. Needless to say he would always come with me on the walks around Shinkyōgoku.
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We had already been to Shinkyōgoku on I don't know how many Sundays before so it was decided that, as it was boring always to return along the same road, wouldn't it be an idea for us to take a different road on this particular occasion; and so moving northwards along a street that runs one or two west of Teramachi we came to the vicinity of Nijō. Right on the street corner there was this rather large Christian church with a big notice outside advertising a speech meeting. A closer look at the notice revealed the name of the speaker and the topic of his address and, taking a peek into the depths of the church, it seemed that the speech had already begun.

I guess it was around April or May time when the days have finally lengthened, and it was decided that, as it was still a little early to go back, why don't we have ourselves a listen to one of these Jesus speeches; yes, that's a good idea, let's do that; and so for the first time in my life I entered a Christian church. There were about five or six people in the audience; they looked like members of the intelligentsia, although one appeared to be a kind of clerk, and were listening, in a variety of wayward postures, to the speech underway.

There is something not of the common herd about the speaker standing at the lectern with his long face sporting a splendid beard and his

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21 Awa 阿波 is the pre-Meiji Restoration name of Tokushima Prefecture.
22 While attending the 'Shō-danrin' Nichiren denomination-affiliated junior high school in Kyoto Tsunawaki Ryūmyō would often go for a Sunday stroll around the streets of the Shinkyōgoku 新京極 area of the city.
23 The events described took place in April or May 1897.
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ramrod-straight back. He is formally dressed in traditional Japanese attire, a *hakama* in the ‘Sendai-hira’ style and a five-crested *haori*, and the delivery of his speech is striking in its brilliance.

Into this scene entered two young apprentice priests in priestly garb; we made our way to a position right before the speaker and, having bowed in unison, plonked ourselves down in the very front seats. I guess the speaker must have been overjoyed that we two young monks should set about listening to his words in such a dignified fashion, while the other members of the audience adopted their ill-mannered postures, for he continues his Christian speech now with a renewed power and eloquence.

In time, an increasing fervour entered into his words, and his performance became so impassioned that he was striking the lectern above our heads with all his might. What is more, we were astonished to find that what had begun as a speech about Christianity had, before we knew it, turned into a speech about Buddhism. "If but one true Nichiren or one true Shinran was to appear in these times, then this

24 The Japanese text switches to the present tense here, lending immediacy to the description.
25 The *hakama* 畢 extends from the waist down and may be in the form of either trousers or a skirt.
26 The *haori* 羽織 is a kind of short coat; in this case it exhibits the family crest in five places, on the front left and right breast areas, on the rear of both sleeves and in the centre of the back.
27 The Japanese *kaji-goromo* (or *kaji-e*) 居士衣 refers to the simple non-ceremonial clothing worn by priests on an everyday basis.
country of Japan would be saved. Surely there is no need to turn to some foreign-imported Christ to help us!” That was what he was saying.

And then the speaker began to relate this strange story.

“Long ago, in a certain place, there was a Zen priest. In front of the gate to his temple was a peasant’s cottage, in which lived a father in his sixties along with his daughter of marriageable age; and the daughter had got herself in the family way (pregnant) by some young man of the village, and at length her stomach had begun to get bigger....” That’s how the story began.

The main points went something like this.

The daughter, whose shape had become unusual, took great care when going for her bath, and so on, not to have this noticed by her headstrong father, but in the end she was found out and closely questioned by him concerning the person responsible. At first the daughter somehow avoided giving a straight answer, but, seeing no other way of

28 Nichiren (1222-1282) was the founder of the Nichiren denomination of Buddhism in Japan. The Nichiren denomination is one of the largest in contemporary Japan.
29 Shinran (1173-1262) was the founder of the True Pure Land (or Jōdo-shin) denomination of Buddhism in Japan. The True Pure Land denomination, like the Nichiren denomination mentioned in Note 28, is one of the largest in contemporary Japan.
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getting herself out of this fix, she began to wonder whether it might not be helpful to blame the Zen master who was renowned by all for his virtue and deeply respected by her father, and ended up blurting out that it was in fact he who had done it.

On hearing this, the father, in spite of the fact it was the middle of the night, set off for the temple, his face distorted with anger, and woke up the sleeping Zen master. "You doubtless recall these events," he said, and severely took him to task. The Zen master, however, showed not the least surprise and, calming down the raging abusive father, he asked: "If that be the case, then what are we to do about it?" In the end it was decided, at the request of the father, that his daughter should go into the care of some distant relatives and that the Zen master should pay all expenses for the birth and send a regular allowance to cover the subsequent living costs of mother and child; with that, the matter was to some extent settled there and then.

Thus passed three long years until the daughter was no longer able to endure the torment of her conscience; she confessed the true story to her father, who, astonished for a second time and with an exclamation of "Oh my goodness!," set off for the temple with a deathly pale complexion to apologize. The Zen master comforted the father who was prostrate in remorse with his head in the earth. "Don't worry. Don't worry. Think nothing of it," were his words as he briskly made his way back into the temple.

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And that was the speaker's story.

"Well, my friends, what do you think of this story, then? Not a trick that can be pulled off by your average man on the street, I think. This is what is meant by the actions of a great person who has, through practice, come to understand the Buddhist teaching of boundless compassion." Thus continued his patient urgings.

It was astonishing for us that a Christian minister should, in this contrary fashion, speak to us about Buddhism and encourage us, too, to be resolute in carrying out our work. All the more so, since up to now we had listened to so many sermons about the Nichiren denomination that we were almost sick of them and could not recall being this moved by any of them. It was a struggle not to fall asleep during lectures at the 'Danrin' (Nichiren denomination-affiliated school), so that we were impressed not only by the content of this speech but by the honesty and enthusiasm with which the minister was sincerely attempting to give people guidance; from then on we took to going to church often to listen to what was said.