ART AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE EAST AND THE WEST
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The following is the text of President Ikeda's lecture at the Académie des Beaux-Arts (Academy of Fine Arts) of the Institut de France, on June 14, 1989.

It is a great privilege for me to speak today on "Art and Spirituality in the East and the West" at the Institut de France, illustrious cradle of a 300-year-old tradition. I would like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to all those to whom I owe this great honor, and in particular to the current president of the Academy of Fine Arts, Mr. André Jacquemin, and to the permanent secretary of the Academy, Mr. Marcel Landowski. I would also like to thank those who, despite the many demands on their time, honor me by their presence.

No doubt many famous men have walked in this room and stood where I am standing now. That stimulates within me an emotion that I find can best be expressed by this poem that I wrote:

There is a generous spring
That suddenly, from the depths of the sea,
Bursts forth in a powerful tide.

Vaster and bluer than an immense lake,
Its sparkling stream runs underground,
Playing a bewitching music.

If man can feel this spring,
And know it to be real and pure,
Inexhaustible since ancient times;
If man can draw from
This power of eternal life that engenders
and regenerates,
Then he will have the power to create
Free from any hindrance.

This is the source of the mystery
That bursts forth from the depths of the universe.
And this is the music
That spans the march of history.

Isn't this music, sacred and magnificent,
Also man's inner rhythm
And a universal tongue?
Who would not listen
To the clarity of this symphony
That flows over the waves of life?
Who could not discover
The rhythm that rises from the depths of the soul
And the inexhaustible creative source?

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Since ancient times, art has appeared as a natural, irrepressible manifestation of human spirituality. In its various forms, spontaneously, art has always symbolized a fundamental reality. While it is true that any form of art is personal and limited in terms of space, we can also say that the soul of the artist tends to reunite with, to rediscover, this fundamental reality that one can call universal life. This refers to the substance of life itself, grasped in all its dynamism through a profound fusion between the self (in other words, the microcosm) and the universe (the macrocosm). It is from this fundamental reality that man derives the energy needed for rebirth. It is here that he finds his reason for being and the axis of his search.

It is generally felt that man needs bread to exist, that his body cannot function without this essential food. Art is to the spirit what bread is to the body: a necessity without which it cannot renew itself. This is what Aristotle referred to when he spoke of catharsis.

We may thus ask ourselves: why does art play such an important role in man's growth and why has this always been so? To me, the major reason seems to lie in art's "Power of synthesis," and in art's capacity to bring together and unify disparate elements. Goethe has Faust say the following in a monologue: "Into the whole how all things blend, / Each in the other working, living!" If at an essential level this is a valid assertion for all beings, art worthy of the name consists in seeking this fundamental reality that creates the link between man and man, man and nature, and man and the universe. The emotion generated by a work of art, be it poetry, painting or music, may be that tangible, unquestionable feeling of a broadening of the self. It is a feeling of fullness, borne from a mysterious rhythm, a kind of flight toward the infinite, lived as a sharing, an exchange, whose source is our interior world.

This power of synthesis, characteristic of art, actualizes itself in the opening of the limited to the unlimited, of individual existence to universal significance. This link with the universal was at one time very much a part of religious rites, and it can also be found in ancient theater. There may not be any significant difference between art and ritual if, as the English author Jane E. Harrison writes: "It is at the out set one and the same impulse that sends a man to church and to the theatre."

I would like to relate an anecdote here, about a famous Kabuki actor who visited Europe a long time ago. During his trip he ha the opportunity to view masterpieces of Western art at the Louvre. Asked about his impressions he was content to answer, "One sees Christ throughout." No doubt a somewhat hasty conclusion, but one that conveyed simply his surprise at discovering the considerable influence of the Christian tradition on Western art. That comment is certainly no more than the testimony of a visitor from the East expressing very personal views of Western art, but he was able to discern the fundamental reality through the particular and express it very concisely.

Notre-Dame de Paris, the cathedral at Chartres — are these not the purest expression of Gothic architecture in Europe as well as the actualization of the worldview of the Christian Middle Ages? Art's power of synthesis is indeed astonishing. Art and religion are inseparable. Man, in his passionate quest for a better life, always arrives at this truth.

What about art in the East? An examination of the aesthetic content of Japanese culture shows that it, too, is colored by religious feeling. Paul Claudel understood and explained this, as did André Malraux, with whom I discussed the subject. The nature of religious tradition in Japan may appear to be somewhat ambiguous, compared to the rigorous monotheism of Christianity. Paul Claudel defined the motivation behind the traditional Japanese aesthetic as "the desire to merge with nature rather than dominate it." A few decades later, Mr. Malraux called the same aesthetic "the interior reality." He had, it seems to me, a very clear perception

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of the religious attitude that links man to the universe and to nature. He has pinpointed the very source of beauty. The tendency toward a fundamental reality has very subtly permeated all of Japanese culture.

In modern times, the decline in the power of synthesis, which art and religion have always expressed, is a problem in the East and West alike. Brilliant minds, foreseeing this difficulty, have been calling attention to it since the end of the nineteenth century. There is no need for me to go into this in detail. But when man breaks his bonds with nature and the universe, his ties with his fellows will also be broken. And then, even isolation will no longer be thought of as a social ill.

It cannot be denied that the very context of art has changed a great deal. For example, conditions in contemporary art are very different from those in Greek theater, where the audience participated in the plays, sometimes even more than the actors themselves. The question, then: how to exert this power of synthesis, this ability to link, in the context of contemporary art? How can it be brought to life in the relationship between the solitary artist, facing the blank page or the virgin canvas, the unknown admirer or reader? Even with talented artists, there is no "field," no shared physical space.

Some people seek the vital strength of prehistory and dream of rediscovering the hardiness of prehistoric man. Others are nostalgic for the power that pulsated on an earth not yet polluted by modernization. That is contemporary man's struggle. This may seem paradoxical, but I believe that, from the end of the nineteenth century until today, because they were the crystallization of the serious issues of their day, great minds have appeared, lighting the night, shining like stars. Indeed, there is today, on the one hand, the greatest freedom and artistic diversity and, on the other, the desire directed inward to repair the fractures of the soul that has lost its connection to its native land. These two aspects of contemporary life are weakening, however, as is the power that enables us to transcend the visible.

I would like now to substitute what Buddhists call kechi-en (a causal relationship, the function that links life to its environment) for the concept of the "power of synthesis."

The concept of causal relationship arises from the theory of "dependent origination," a philosophical construct existing throughout the history of Buddhism, since Shakyamuni's time. This theory holds that every phenomenon, social as well as natural, results from a link with another phenomenon, and that nothing can occur in isolation. In other words, all that comes about is the result of interaction. Usually we conceive of interaction in spatial terms. But the causal relationship, in Buddhism, is multidimensional, transcending both space and time.

In the Japanese aesthetic consciousness, there is the idea of harmony with nature, which attracted writers like Paul Claudel and André Malraux. This traditional Japanese understanding of beauty is underpinned not only by a kind of primitive animism, but also by the Buddhist idea of "dependent origination."

Traditional Japanese art forms (the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, gardens, paintings on sliding doors or folding screens, etc.) have no value if they are taken alone. They only gain their full meaning when they are placed in a "field," in the center of an ordinary space, in the heart of everyday life. In other words, the link they establish with the space around them is what gives them their entire value. I would also like to add that in the beginning, traditional forms of Japanese poetry, like renga and haiku, could not have existed without this "field," with out a space where authors could gather.

Buddhism explains the "dependent origination" of all phenomena through the concept of ku (sometimes translated a "void"). The tendency to associate the notion of ku (life in a state of latency) with the notion of nothingness still exists. Buddhism itself is partially responsible for

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this, particularly Southern, .or Hinayana, Buddhism, which arrives at a kind of nihilism by searching for enlightenment through the negation of worldly values. But the concept of ku in Northern, or Mahayana, Buddhism is totally different from the Southern Schools' static, nihilistic understanding of ku. Northern Buddhism describes a reality that changes from one moment to the next, the flowing movement of life itself. We may find a parallel in the more familiar tradition of the West, in the philosophy of Bergson, which strives to comprehend life in terms of its continuity.

I am tempted to call this dynamism, this vital energy contained in the state of ku as defined by Northern Buddhism, "creative life."

A creative life devotes itself entirely to going beyond the individual self by continually transcending the limits of space and time in pursuit of a universal self. In other words, this creative life develops in leaps and achieves renewal each day, in keeping with the original rhythm of the universe.

My conversations with Mr. René Huyghe, of the Académie Française, were published ten (1980) years ago. In them, Mr. Huyghe gave an excellent definition of the heart of Northern Buddhism, which he called "spiritual life," thus showing his deep understanding of the subject. He states, "We are linked to the creative action of the future, toward which the universe is moving."

The Lotus Sutra, the quintessence of Northern Buddhism, gives various explanations of the dynamic force of the creative life. It reveals an entity of a totally free life, without limits (from the spatial as well as the temporal point of view), and affirms that this entire existence is contained in a single moment. The first part of the Lotus Sutra teaches that all phenomena are based on a fundamental Law. When we fuse with this Law, all these phenomena are contained in our life in the present moment, and this life permeates the entire universe. In the latter part of the sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha reveals that he has been a Buddha since a very distant past, a past without beginning, and he explains the eternity of life. The past and the future "condense" themselves into the present moment.

This union of one's life with all phenomena and the condensation of time are what constitute the dynamism of the creative life, free from all hindrances. In our daily lives, drawing on the energy of this creative life enables us to take action endlessly and to progress along our own path of accomplishment.

The remarkable significance of the Lotus Sutra in relation to other sutras is that it dares to seek the training ground of the "path of the bodhisattva" in the very heart of our present troubled society and to assert that it is in the midst of this reality that one can polish one's life and forge a universal self that transcends the lesser self.

The descriptions in the Lotus Sutra are rich in picturesque, dramatic and literary images. In the middle section of the Lotus Sutra, the Ceremony in the Air is described, in which an enormous treasure tower decorated with seven kinds of jewels (made of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, pearls, etc.) appears in the sky.

This treasure tower rising high in the universe symbolizes the grandeur and dignity of life. The peaceful world, described in the chapter on "The Life Span of the Thus Come One" is a land "constantly filled with gods and men," where

the halls and pavilions in its gardens
and groves
are adorned with all kinds of gems.
Jeweled trees abound in flowers
and fruit,

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where living beings enjoy
themselves at ease.
The gods strike heavenly drums,
constantly making many kinds of music.
Mandarava blossoms rain down,
scattering over the Buddha and the great assembly.

Painting, music and poetic images vie with each other to evoke a truly wonderful world. Although history often shows us antagonism between art and religion, the Lotus Sutra, with great strength of imagination, shows clearly that art and religion harmonize with and complement each other.

Every dimension of human life (which comprises, according to Kierkegaard, the religious, ethical and aesthetic dimensions) is encompassed in the dynamic development of the creative life as revealed in the Lotus Sutra. When these dimensions are brought into fusion to form what could be called the "cosmic movement," after repeated sublimation and selection, what images will finally appear? We can think of a multicolored top that finally looks as though it is just one color as it spins faster and faster. I recall a passage from a Buddhist scripture that defines the essence of the Lotus Sutra perfectly. It goes as follows: "Even if you are not Mahakashyapa, you should dance. Even if you are not Shariputra, you should get up and dance. Is it not through dancing that Bodhisattva Jogyo rose out of the earth?" Mahakashyapa and Shariputra, who represent intelligence, were among Shakyamuni's best disciples.

In the passage above, the word dance symbolizes the joy they felt upon hearing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Jogyo was at the head of the numerous bodhisattvas whom Shakyamuni, when he expounded the Lotus Sutra, caused to emerge from beneath the earth so as to entrust them with propagating the Law after his death.

I am very moved by the great beauty of the images —"dance," "get up and dance," and "through dancing"— w h i c h , full of life and energy, are used to describe these bodhisattvas appearing from the earth. This is an excellent way of calling to mind the dynamism of the creative life, which pulses ceaselessly, like the beating of a heart.

What is the meaning of the descriptions in the Lotus Sutra? They have been explained as being figurative descriptions of the movements of an individual life. The expression "through dancing" should thus not be taken to describe an objective fact but rather as a symbol of the creative life. The image of the bodhisattvas springing forth symbolizes joy, but not a simple joy. It is the joy that is supreme among all joys, the joy that is felt in contributing unceasingly to the good of society and in searching deeply for the meaning of a life regulated by the fundament Law of the universe.

The purity of this symbol reminds me of a beautiful passage by Paul Valéry, where, in dialogue in *Dance and the Soul*, in his inimitable style, he has Socrates say: "…while this exaltation and vibration of life, while this supremacy of tension, and this whirling into the greatest agility humanly possible, have the virtues and powers of flame; and that the shames, the worries, the sillinesses and the monotonous fare of existence are consumed in it, making a shining light in our eyes of what is divine in a mortal woman?"

Admittedly, these two passages, from Valéry and Buddhist literature, are very different sorts of writings. Still, it is interesting to note how our imagination naturally turns to the image of dance when we try to use language to express the purest and ultimate forms of movement.

We live today in a time of difficulty and change unprecedented in human history. In such times, many people look inward — this is quite evident. Paul Valéry, at the end of his life, tried

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to create a "society of minds." When we talked together, André Malraux, who was thinking in the same vein, had already foreseen that a spiritual revolution would take place in the coming century. The appearance and development of a creative life, thanks to inner changes in man, will certainly lead the way to just such a spiritual revolution. I am convinced that this surge in and blossoming of the creative life will also be at the root of the revitalization of all human activities, beginning with art. I would like to conclude with a poem that I composed in honor of art:

Art,
O eternal light,
Imperishable imprint of civilizations!

Hymn to life,
To liberty, to creation, to joy!
Intense prayer,
Profound harmony with the fundamental reality!

Forum of friendship,
Where millions of beings
Join with, greet, and smile
at each other.
A man of letters declared in the West:
East is East and West is West,
But when the two giants meet
Boundaries and nationalities will disappear."

At the same time, in the East,
A great poet wrote:
"East and West must marry
On the altar of humanity

And here is Art,
Inviting the soul by reaching her hand out
Toward a soothing and serene wood,
Toward a garden where imagination blazes
across the sky;
Inviting it to the noble stage of wisdom
And leading it toward the far-off horizon
Of universal civilization.

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