

SYMPOSIA ON PSYCHOLOGY AND BUDDHISM HELD

On Aug. 22 and 23, the American Psychological Association Convention in Boston featured two symposia on Buddhism and psychology. Despite the 8 a.m. start, both were filled to capacity, with 250 attendees combined, reflecting the growing interest of Western psychologists in the psychological aspects of Buddhism. Both symposia were offered by psychologists and physicians from the SGI in collaboration with their colleagues.

The first symposium, "Where Buddhism and Psychology Meet: Perspectives on Empowerment," explored how Buddhism enables people to gain control over their lives. The panel of psychology professors included Anthony J. Marsella (chair), Kathleen H. Dockett and the director of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy Yoichi Kawada, who discussed Buddhist empowerment from such diverse perspectives as the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism; the psychotherapeutic perspective of Daseinsanalysis (a form of existential psychology); and the health promotion and community building perspective of community psychology.

The second symposium was "Buddhism and Psychology: Reflections in Personal Transformation and Global Responsiveness." It explored the contributions of Jungian Depth Psychology and Mahayana Buddhism to the search for peaceful alternatives to the challenges of ethnic and national conflict that threaten all of humanity. The panelists were SGI members including physicians Yoichi Kawada (translator Andrew Gebert) and Alwin Harding, and psychologists Douglas K. Pryor (chair), Kathleen Dockett, Daniel Cantor Yalowitz and Carmen Ada Gonzalez. They concluded that both Jungian psychology and Buddhism offer ways to understand how the inner collective connections that human beings share may be used to create societal bridges.

The importance of our interconnectedness to one another and to the environment emerged as a central theme across the papers of both sessions. Whether talking about empowering people or fostering tolerance of cultural difference, the Buddhist principle of dependent origination and the altruistic life of the bodhisattva are key. As Dr. Kawada stated: "When the wisdom to perceive the reality of interdependence (the technical term is dependent origination) is awakened, humans are naturally enabled to act with compassion, knowing that what benefits others benefits ourselves. Blinded to this reality, on the other hand, we divide being into disjunctive realms of "self" and "other," and will seek to profit ourselves at the expense of others."

In his message to the Buddhism and Psychology symposium, President Ikeda points to a rising tide of profound hope that is signaled by exploring empowerment in its relation with the cosmic power that propels the creative evolution of the universe.

—KATHLEEN H. DOCKETT