

## THE GOOD AS CREATIVE BECOMING IN WIEMAN AND BUDDHISM

David Lee Miller

### *Introduction*

This essay is a cross-cultural inquiry into the good as experienced at the human level of existence. The focus of the study is the notion of the good as created, as creative, and as creative event in the writings of Henry Nelson Wieman, and the notion of the good as *śūnyatā* in the Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism. Kenneth Inada has provided the immediate impetus for the essay through his long and serious consideration of *śūnyatā*, and through his suggestion that its American analogue might be found in the thought of Henry Nelson Wieman. In 1976 Inada wrote with regard to *śūnyatā* that, "It is perhaps close to...Wieman's concrete fullness of quality."<sup>1</sup> In 1979 he wrote that, "I take the concept of *śūnyatā* to be the single most important doctrine of Mahāyāna."<sup>2</sup> Continuing, he says that, "In fact, it is that which lies at the basis of the Mahāyāna, i.e. the experimental basis which ends up in the myth of the Bodhisattva Ideal with its extensive nature of compassion and wisdom."<sup>3</sup>

In a recently published essay, Inada suggests the rich possibilities for *śūnyatā*. Writing specifically with regard to the prospects of the American involvement with *śūnyatā*, he formulates the following challenge:

Thus far we have presented various meanings and characteristics on the concept of *śūnyatā*. They are by no means

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1 Kenneth K. Inada, from unpublished commentary on "Creativity in the Buddhist Perspective," by Nolan Jacobson, delivered in New Orleans, Louisiana, April 29, 1976, to the Society for Philosophy of Creativity, p. 2.

2 Personal letter, Kenneth K. Inada to Nolan P. Jacobson, Buffalo, New York, April 28, 1979. Used with the permission of the recipient.

3 *Ibid.*

exhaustive; in fact they only point up the need of further explorations that should only lead to more novel interpretations of the role and function of the concept in our experiences.<sup>4</sup>

The intent of this essay is to respond to Inada's challenge for further explorations, and to show that Wieman's emphasis upon the good is an excellent, perhaps the best American analogue for *śūnyatā*.

#### *Wieman's Concept of Good*

For Wieman, the most fundamental kind of good is creative good. Creative good is the process that creates, sustains, and transforms human beings in ways in which they cannot create, sustain, and transform themselves. Creative good is the creative event,<sup>5</sup> which itself is made up of four subevents. This creative event is at the heart of Wieman's philosophy of religion, and it is this event that distinguishes his particular type of process philosophy. As Wieman puts it: "It should be noted that the creative event, together with every one of the subevents, is an *ing*."<sup>6</sup>

Wieman offers the following summary of the process nature of the creative event and its subevents:

The subevents are emergings, integratings, expandings, deepenings, that is, they are not accomplished facts. After the event is accomplished, it is no longer creative. Hence the creative subevents (as well as the total creative event) are events in process. They are happenings in transit, not finished products, although they yield a finished product.

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4 Kenneth K. Inada, "The American Involvement with *Śūnyatā*: Prospects," in *Buddhism and American Thinkers*, Kenneth K. Inada and Nolan P. Jacobsen, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 86.

5 Creative good is indistinguishable from creative event in Wieman's thought. As he puts this point in *The Source of Human Good*, "This process of reorganization is what we shall call the 'creative event.' It is creative good, standing in contrast to both kinds of created good we have been considering." Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 56.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

The finished product of these four-ings, and hence the product of the total creative event, is always a new structure, whereby some events are more widely and richly related in meaningful connections.<sup>7</sup>

The four subevents are the life-sustaining and transforming qualities people experience when they are most deeply and vividly alive. Creative good always comes through events and remakes us in ways in which we cannot remake ourselves. Wieman explains this good as radical and complex process in the following:

The four subevents are: emerging awareness of qualitative meaning derived from other persons through communication; integrating these new meanings with others previously acquired; expanding the richness of quality in the appreciable world by enlarging its meaning; deepening the community among those who participate in this creative event of intercommunication.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout his writings, Wieman contrasts creative good with created good in order to show the unlimited nature of creative good and the limited nature of created good. Created good refers to an enormous range of goods--scientific discoveries, art forms, organized religions, and to other positive but limited achievements in the lives of individuals and cultures. Wieman summarizes the essential point about created good when he writes that "(Human) personality is a created good, and so (is) society, ...culture, (and) ideals."<sup>9</sup> Created good is a certain kind of good. It is limited and replaceable good. It is quite clear that Wieman thinks that humankind should get the full measure of value from created good. In fact, he says that, "Not to enjoy and use all the good thus far created and do it to the utmost limit of one's capacity, is itself a delinquency."<sup>10</sup>

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7 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

10 Henry Nelson Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), p. 107.

Wieman's greatest concern, however, is that we might fail to understand the nature and place of created good in our lives. His greatest concern is that we take created good as the absolute and irreplaceable good. He sounds a serious warning when he writes that, "The gravest peril that people have to face resides in the way qualitative meaning, created good, can arouse an absoluteness and supremacy of loyalty which only its source, creative good, the generating event, really commands."<sup>11</sup> Created good, whatever its origin and nature, cannot long endure without becoming a mocking idol, easily fooling people, causing them to seriously block the creative source of all good.

The preciousness of the created good should always alert us to its dark, life threatening side, which is its enormous capacity for establishing itself as the supreme and final good for humankind. Created good has a powerful way of urging itself upon us as the complete and absolute good, and it is exceedingly difficult to criticize and correct our judgments about created good. Wieman lets us know again and again about this central threat posed by created good in human experience. The sole corrective for the dehumanizing dominance of created good in our lives is creative good, the creative event which sustains and transforms us in ways in which we cannot sustain and transform ourselves.

The threat of created good as finality gains clarity when we are able to see that the confusion arises out of human fallibility. From ignorance and insecurity arise the craving for created good, and the result is suffering in various forms. According to Wieman, created good held in the wrong perspective leads to suffering.

But if this enrichment cannot be used, or is not used, to promote further creative transformation, it is used to waste, to destroy, and to dissipate. This shows that created good,

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<sup>11</sup> Wieman, *The Source of Human Good*, p. 24.

no matter how great it may become, cannot satisfy the individual in the wholeness of his (her) being, but rather induces inner conflicts.<sup>12</sup>

The great good for which humankind is properly destined is not a created good of any type nor is it a created good considered in toto. No matter how great and no matter how helpful to humankind, created good should never claim our ultimate allegiance and devotion. Created good is settled human achievement, and as such shows its secondary importance in our lives. The essential point is to see that all created good centers in and emerges out of the creative event that shapes and reshapes continuously all of human life. To see and understand this essential point is to see and understand the great calling for humankind; it is to face squarely the momentous conflict of created good with creative good. Wieman puts this struggle in a very forthright way.

Humankind is the battleground on which a great fight is always being fought. It is conflict between the demands of unlimited growth on the one hand, and, on the other, the demands of some limited form of growth, whether it be the individual personality, or a home or small community, or a nation or a culture, or some planetary epoch. Always in (people) is the demand to defend, to stabilize, to fixate some such order of life, and to attack and destroy all that threatens it. On the other hand, there is also the deepest demand of (human) nature...the demand for unlimited growth.<sup>13</sup>

The unlimited growth for which we should live can never be circumscribed by the designs of human emotion, will, or reason. This unlimited growth works in and through human feeling, volition, and thought, but fundamentally is beneath and beyond them. The unlimited growth is potentially everywhere and always is the source of human good, the living matrix out of which all created good arises.

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<sup>12</sup> Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment*, p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Nelson Wieman and Walter Horton, *The Growth of Religion* (Chicago and New York: Willett, Clark and Company, 1938), pp. 478-479.

We do and must live in the two realities of created and creative good, but the realities are interconnected in very intimate ways. The reality of creative good is the totally reliable, undefined, and unformed source of all created good. The obvious good is created good; the unobvious good is creative good. Created good always stands in need of criticism and correction; creative is always moving in and through created good trying to transform it into greater good. Wieman epitomizes the point by writing that, "The greatest good is the process itself although it cannot be separated from what it creates."<sup>14</sup>

#### *Wieman's Concept of Good as Śūnyatā*

The inseparability of the process of creativity and the multiplicity of the products it produces (created Good) is the way from Wieman's philosophy to the Buddhist perspective of śūnyatā. Śūnyatā,<sup>15</sup> in one sense, is the radically open character of human experience that is infinitely productive of the determinate and specific forms of the world. In this meaning, śūnyatā is the Buddhist analogue to Wieman's creative good, the opening of the world into ever novel forms of created good. Herbert Guenther puts this meaning in the following way:

This term names an openness that cannot be limited by an unvarying and exhaustively specifiable mode of being. It imparts to each and every complex individual an openness and profundity inasmuch as, figuratively speaking, it is (dynamically not statically) the concentration, though nowhere localized, of the infinitely rich potential of possible structures (sarvakaravaropeta), of qualities which will be

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<sup>14</sup> Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment*, p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> Śūnyatā has many meanings, and in all of its meanings is intended to aid us in our experience of the concrete fullness of the good. For an account of this term and its dangers see Lama Anagarika Govinda's *Creative Meditation and Multi Dimensional Consciousness* (Wheaton, Ill., U.S.A., Madras, India, London, England: The Theosophical House, 1976), pp. 37-41.

transformed and deformed into quantities during the unfolding of this śūnyatā.<sup>16</sup>

Śūnyatā as the radically open character of experience suggests a second and very closely related meaning of the term: śūnyatā as the self-surpassing character of experience. Nolan Jacobson expresses this meaning when he writes that, "...Śūnyatā ...may best be thought of as the limitless, self-surpassing foster-mother of all becoming in the flow of the undifferentiated aesthetic continuum of life."<sup>17</sup> Our lives are passed in self-surpassing openness. For Wieman, creative good as the creative event in its microevents of emergence, integration, expansion, and depth is this self-surpassing openness of śūnyatā. Both creative good and śūnyatā are terms that reveal the crux of reality as unceasing disclosure in multi-level intensities and configurations.

Śūnyatā, in another sense, means the unity giving character within experience. In this sense, it is that which perpetually conjoins the disjunctive elements within experience. It is what makes intelligible and meaningful union possible. Śūnyatā in its power to provide unity is the creative good, the creative event which as part of its meaning is integration and community. Creative good as śūnyatā is the integrative reality. Inada explains its integrative character in the following:

In order to make clear its cogency, śūnyatā must in the final analysis be a positive force; it must be that which makes the relational origination possible. In other words, śūnyatā must be that which makes the process of integration possible. In this sense, I make bold the following assertion: śūnyatā has the cementing effect in each experiential reality. In this sense, relational origination is really a series of so-called

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16 Herbert V. Guenther, "Tasks Ahead: Presidential Address on the Occasion of the Third Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies," Winnipeg, Canada, August, 1980, p. 120.

17 Nolan Pliny Jacobson, *Buddhism and the Contemporary World* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983) p. 157.

cementing phenomena. It is the basic ground for reality to continue to flow.<sup>18</sup>

At the heart of Wieman's concept of creative good is the concept of śūnyatā as here defined by Inada. Indeed, creative good is fundamentally a process of progressive integration<sup>19</sup> of individual persons in community. In this sense, creative good understood as śūnyatā is the movement in the direction of ever greater coherent unity in human experience. Experience forever open, self-surpassing and integrative is experience lived most fully out of a commitment to the plenum of existence, to the creative foundations of the world and human life.

In Wieman's emphasis upon creative good as the creative event and the Buddhist emphasis upon śūnyatā, we have a paradigm for understanding good wherever it emerges in the world. Many approaches are needed to begin to understand this paradigm. Images are especially helpful in this task for they have within them the power to reveal the concreteness of the creative good as śūnyatā, and at the same time insofar as they reflect our common world they extend beyond the individual to insight between individuals who are trying to understand this reality. Shin-ichi Hisamatsu provides a marvelous image for helping us to understand. He writes:

Waves are not something that come from outside the water and are reflected in the water. Waves are produced by the water but are never separated by the water. When they cease to be waves, they return to the water - their original source. Returning to the water, they do not leave the slightest trace in the water. Speaking from the side of the water, the waves

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18 Inada, *Buddhism and American Thinkers*, p. 84.

19 Wieman once told me that he had used the idea of progressive integration to explain what he had later come to explain with the idea of creative interchange. This is important for it suggests his basic attitude about language. Like the Buddhist, his idea is that language functions properly to illuminate and improve human experience. Language rightly understood, according to Wieman, is always an instrument that serves the creative good of life, and this means that language changes continuously as life undergoes its perpetual transformations.



are the movement of the water. While the water in the wave is one with the wave and not two, the water does not come into being and disappear, increase or decrease, according to the coming into being and disappearing of the wave. Although the water as waves comes into being and disappears, the water as water does not come into being and disappear. Thus, even when changing into a thousand or ten thousand waves, the water itself is constant and unchanging.<sup>20</sup>

Translating the image from the above quotation into the language of creative good as *śūnyatā*, we may say that the water is creative good while the ever changing waves represent created good. Images as well as concepts function as evocative pointers in Buddhism and in Wieman, illuminating the ultimacy of the creative good as *śūnyatā*, and the relationship of this good with all created good.

According to Wieman, "Created good includes beauty, love, friendship, power of achievement, and all the values commonly sought and prized by human beings."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, these created goods are of great importance for us but their importance is exaggerated when mistaken for the fundamental good, as they often are. In a world unstable and precarious, great temptations arise to seize and cling to whatever created good we are able to experience. The created goods thus serve to cut us away from the creative good. Our lives continue to move, but the movement is not in the way of emergence, integration, expansion, and depth. The movement has holding and even contracting characteristics. It revolves around created good. All types of created good can at any time become evil by being claimed as the fundamental and final good by human beings. As Wieman explains it

Every value in modern life can become demonic - beauty, truth, morality alike - if and when it excludes the demands of creative good in the name of false finality of what has been

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20 Shin-ichi Hisamatsu, "The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness," *Philosophical Studies of Japan*, compiled by the Japanese National Commission for Unesco (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1960), p. 96.

21 Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment*, p. 58.

created. In so far as goods become demonic, they impoverish and destroy, rather than conserve and increase, the good of human life, for they oppose their creator.<sup>22</sup>

Frederick Streng has analyzed śūnyatā in one of its meanings as an emptying process that protects us from "the false finality of what has been created." He writes that, "It may be helpful to see the religious significance of the awareness of emptiness, i.e., of the emptying process, as a parallel to the destruction of idolatry in the prophetic religions."<sup>23</sup> Śūnyatā, Streng tells us, enables us to avoid the absolute claims made upon us by the created and relative things of this world. Śūnyatā in its meaning of emptiness provides a perspective of the lack of absoluteness of all created good, and thus in this meaning of the word keeps us alert to the potential idolatry in all created good. As Streng writes, "The awareness of emptiness provides this freedom in that objects or forces which make an absolute claim on the individual are seen as empty. As this awareness grows, there is a continual process of detachment from these claims and an expansion of awareness."<sup>24</sup>

It is this expansion of awareness, as we have seen, that is so integral to Wieman's view of the creative event. Following Streng's meaning of śūnyatā and Wieman's view of created good, we may say that all particular things that we find and call good have a negative identity in that they are not ultimately good, but their character as good depends upon a creative source that is far more fundamental than the particular goods themselves. Sunyata as the negative identity of created good is a poignant reminder of the creative source of all good as well as a means whereby we can distinguish more clearly and adjust more realistically and joyfully to the many varieties of created good that

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22 Wieman, *The Source of Human Good*, p. 25.

23 Frederick Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 165.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

we are able to experience. Streng summarizes the point by writing that, "Dwelling in emptiness meant living in an openness to experience."<sup>25</sup>

For Wieman, this openness to experience is the very center of experience that is characterized by continuing emergence, integration, expansion, and depth. Such openness to experience by living in touch with the creative event can be described in the same way that sunyata in its positive meanings is described earlier in this essay. That is to say, for Wieman, the openness to experience which comes from living deeply and intimately with the creative event is the open, self-surpassing, and integrative character of human experience.

Wieman maintains that faith reveals the self-surpassing and open character of human experience. In this connection, he writes that, "Faith is whole-hearted and utter readiness for the fullest and freest spontaneity of responsiveness to the unforeseeable riches of each emergent situation."<sup>26</sup> There is a type of utter receptiveness in Wieman's account of faith. Through faith as a basic expression of creative good as sunyata,<sup>27</sup> we have a guide for the greatest reach and depth of our individual experiences. The possibilities for positive human development are enormous, and Wieman challenges all of our resources for imagination and commitment when he writes that, "The riches of existence are infinite."<sup>28</sup>

K. Venkata Ramanan summarizes both the negative and the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Wieman and Horton, *The Growth of Religion*, p. 480.

<sup>27</sup> In this paradigm of creative good as sunyata, the claim is that creative good in Wieman and sunyata in Buddhism point to the identical features of the open, self-surpassing, and integrative qualities of human experience. In this way, they are analogues for each other. Therefore, it is equally permissible to say sunyata as creative good as it is to say creative good as sunyata.

<sup>28</sup> Wieman and Horton, *The Growth of Religion*, p. 400.

positive meanings of sunyata in the following:

Sunyata as the mundane truth is relativity and conditioned becoming; this is brought to light by rejecting the supposed ultimacy and absoluteness of particular entities and specific concepts and conceptual systems. Sunyata as the ultimate truth is the unconditioned, undivided being which is the ultimate nature of the conditioned and the contingent; this is brought to light, again, by rejecting through criticism the imagination of the ultimacy of the conditionedness of the conditioned and consequently, of the division between the conditioned and the unconditioned. The first kind of criticism and the truth it brings to light are just called sunyata, whereas the second kind is, strictly speaking, sunyata of sunyata (sunyata-sunyata).<sup>29</sup>

Ramanan further explains that all criticism in the Buddhist perspective is in the service of freeing the self from the suffering brought about by clinging emotions and confused thinking. The purpose of criticism is part of the larger way that we must follow in order to become more fully human. He writes that, "The primary purpose of criticism is to set free the thirst for the real from its moorings in abstractions, its illusions about the nature of things, and to direct it to the truly unconditioned."<sup>30</sup> For Wieman, created good is an abstraction, and he tells us again and again that humankind has made a tragic mistake whenever it establishes its moorings in this abstraction. Yet we frequently seize the abstraction, in whatever form that we find it, and allow it to take over our lives, driving us to distraction and perhaps to destruction.

We must alter our fundamental orientation away from all created good toward creative good. As Wieman explains it, The essential thing is the redirection of the movement of the total self from the pursuit of specifically chosen goods and goals to the pursuit of those goods which are unknown until they are brought to light in the creative richness of concrete

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29 K. Venkata Ramanan, *Nagarjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Maha-Prajnaparamita-Sastra* (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc., 1966), pp. 172-173.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 173

situations."<sup>31</sup> One gives one's experience into the transforming power of that of which he or she knows very little, and over which he or she has very little control. This self-giving is our vulnerability and constitutes our opportunity for wisdom and compassion in the world. This shift in orientation is not without peril and requires great courage and dedicated practice. Wieman gives this challenge sharp focus when he declares that, "One gives up specific self-direction as at present established and commits himself (herself) to the direction of the best that is unpredictably brought forth in the ceaseless innovations and creative syntheses of actual living."<sup>32</sup>

Of course, there is no easy way to bring about redirection of our lives. We are almost always uneasy with our vulnerability, and hence we are almost always driven to seize onto and hold absolutely created good in its many different forms. It is very difficult not to regard ourselves as *mere additives* to the good of the universe, when those of us who have been nurtured into adulthood through the Western traditions of philosophy and religion are conditioned to think, feel, and act in The Platonic-Aristotelian-Cartesian Mode of "Absolute Being, Abstract Reason, and Determinate Form."<sup>33</sup> This tradition has shaped millions upon millions of people to believe deeply in the truth of an infinitely faultless God, a God-given ability to use our abstract reason

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31 Wieman and Horton, *The Growth of Religion*, p. 304.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 304.

33 "The Platonic-Aristotelian-Cartesian Mode of Absolute Being, Abstract Reason, and Determinate Form" is essentially the assumption of cognitive accessibility to reality. Through this central tradition of Western philosophy, the dominant emphasis has been that abstract reason is capable of understanding Determinate Form and Absolute Being. The Buddhist-Wieman emphasis, on the other hand, is one of cognitive inaccessibility so far as the form of being is concerned. This emphasis stresses the unpredictable and naturally mysterious nature of being, the indeterminacy of form, and the inherent limits of abstract reason.

to control ourselves, others, and the earth on which we live, and a rather simplistic faith in the determinate forms of the things that we find within our world.

Consequently we do not have that kind of freedom to live freshly and boldly for the creative good in our lives. Out of the Oriental tradition, sunyata is a model that provides important clues concerning how we might escape becoming disabled by looking upon ourselves as *mere additives* in a carefully planned and calculated universe of "Absolute Being, Abstract Reason, and Determinate Form." Wieman's model of creative good is the Western analogue to sunyata, and taken together they constitute a paradigm for seeing ourselves not as *mere additives*, but rather as important co-creators in a universe that is fundamentally dynamic, unfinished, and interrelated.

The paradigm of creative good as sunyata explains the way we are vividly and meaningfully in the living, forming foundations of the world. As we direct our energy, attention, and devotion to these moving foundations, we experience ourselves as essential and integral aspects of the all-pervasive, unceasing, and sustaining processes of the world. With this paradigm as our guide, we become increasingly aware that we are obliged to live on the breaking edge of our experience in a world that is forever open, self-surpassing, and integrative.

It is in the moving fullness of concrete experience with its open, self-surpassing, and integrative character that we are able to experience the greatest good available to us. Reason and language easily obstruct, distort, and attenuate this moving fullness of concrete experience by insinuating themselves into the heart of the moving process with powerful thrusts, claiming more than they can properly deliver. The moving fullness of creative good as sunyata is fundamentally beyond all language and all reason, and both Buddhism and Wieman warn us continually about this very important point. Guenther extracts the basic Buddhist view from a Sutra:

Deep, peaceful, beyond judgment, abstract  
And radiant-like nectar have I found it.  
Even if pointed out none can understand it  
Discursively. Where you cannot speak, be silent.<sup>34</sup>

Wieman warns us in very much the same way about the negative insinuations of abstract reason and language into the flow of creativity. He cautions that, "There are depths in life which no theology can reach."<sup>35</sup> He continues:

It is true past gainsaying that one can never know the riches of what is good until he (she) finds it in the concrete, and in the concrete it always overflows the abstract specifications of human thought and active control. There is always more than one could have calculated.<sup>36</sup>

The best to be hoped for when the abstractions produced by the human mind come to dominate our lives inappropriately is that we have the wherewithal to pause meditatively, so that we might reflect upon the inappropriate abstractions. This pause that makes possible the needed reflection then might result in the necessary criticism and correction. With characteristic Buddhist emphasis, Wieman stresses the difficulty involved.

By no means am I always faithful to the theological task thus understood. Again and again I revert to insistence on my theological theory as though it were more important than the creativity which is not a theory nor a concept and at its deeper levels escape (s) all conceptual apprehension. But in times of meditation I recover somewhat from this unfaithfulness.<sup>37</sup>

There is a deliverance of which we stand in need in the Western tradition. It is deliverance from "The Platonic-Aristotelian-Cartesian Mode of Absolute Being, Abstract Reason,

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34 Herbert V. Guenther, *Treasures on the Tibetan Middle Way* (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1976), p. 112.

35 Henry Nelson Wieman, "Reply to Parsons," *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman*, Robert W. Bretall, ed. The Library of Living Theology (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 135.

36 Wieman and Horton, *The Growth of Religion*, p. 292.

37 Bretall, ed. *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman*, pp. 377-378.

and Determinate Form," whenever this mode insinuates itself into the deep and rich flow of existence, claiming to explain more than it could ever possibly explain. Language as the basic manifestation of this mode of understanding often cripples our best efforts to live freely, fully, and richly in the world. Guenther makes this point about language when he insists that

Never is language and its use something mechanical. But linguists keep forgetting this and also fail to take into account that language carries with it the imprint of our physical, social and spiritual consciousness and that only as a process can it speak to us. Its end product has, quite literally, nothing to say.<sup>38</sup>

The paradigm of creative good as sunyata is the evocative pointer, revelatory of the self-surpassing openness and unity giving character of experience in process throughout existence. Creative good gives rise quite naturally as the way of being in the world with others in communicative and compassionate responsiveness. Human life is ongoing novel togetherness, an emerging creative synthesis in which the individual person feels increasingly united with all else that is alive. The pain and joy, the tears and laughter of all that is other than the self come in this way to be an intimate part of the self. My self and other selves are then seen to be a false dichotomy--as the intrinsic interrelatedness of all existence is experienced to be the fundamental reality.

### Conclusion

Wieman's thinking and writing were largely without the shaping influences of the Buddhist point of view.<sup>39</sup> Yet increasingly we are seeing the main Buddhist themes in his various

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38 Herbert V. Guenther, *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective* (Emeryville, Calif.: Dharma Publishing, 1977), p. ix.

39 See my "Buddhist Themes in Wieman's View of Creative Interchange," in *Creative Interchange*, John A. Broyer and William S. Minor, ed. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 401-420.



philosophical and theological efforts. This connection between Wieman and Buddhism has a way of continuing to insist that we notice it. In August 1984, while reading through the large collection of Wieman's personal letters in the Archives at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, I discovered that Wieman had carried on a very important seventeen year correspondence with a Japanese professor of English at Waseda University. Ichiro Hara was a great admirer of Soto Zen, the nature poetry of Wordsworth, and the notion of creativity that he discovered in several of Wieman's books. In an early letter (December 28, 1950) to Wieman, Hara expresses confidence that Wieman's view is very close to the ancient religions of the Orient, especially Buddhism. The correspondence between the two men reaches a high point in which Wieman writes Hara (February 15, 1960), explicitly presenting six points of similarity between his religious naturalism and Soto Zen. One of the salient features of this long and intense correspondence between Wieman and Hara is Hara's obvious pleasure and satisfaction in seeing Wieman move away from a Christian view in the direction, as Hara thought of it, to a more universal view. This more universal view we may now say has important Buddhist elements within it.

Also in August 1984, I read a paper at the Wieman Centennial Conference in Carbondale entitled, "Creative Interchange as the Bodhisattva Ideal." Mrs. Wieman was in the audience, and at the end of the paper came directly to the podium and said to me: "I have something for you." The following day she brought a manuscript entitled, "Creation Without A Creator," as well as a personal note that had accompanied the manuscript in May, 1984. Henry Nelson Wieman's daughter, Kendra Smith, had sent both the manuscript and the personal note to Mrs. Wieman. The first paragraph of the note reads as follows:

As I was finishing a paper to be presented at a conference it seemed to me that my thought was quite in tune with my father's. But then, it (the paper) is on Buddhism and I have

always said that I believed there was more similarity between his thinking and Buddhism than he ever conceded.<sup>40</sup>

The commonality between Wieman and Buddhism is one part of a much larger confluence of philosophy and theology of the major American thinkers during the last one hundred years with the central themes of Buddhism. C. S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead share the crucial themes of the Buddhist legacy, including emphasis upon the limits of abstract thinking, the impermanence of all things, and the liberating possibilities from a disciplined and creative thinking applied to the myriad difficulties of living. Although generally neglected by both philosophers and theologians, Wieman belongs with this distinguished assemblage of thinkers in our recent history. As we continue to think and write of the similarities of theme and thesis between these American thinkers and Buddhism, Wieman's contribution will doubtless be significant indeed.

This essay is another suggestion of a significant and shared emphasis in Wieman and Buddhism.<sup>41</sup> Good in both is fundamentally creative good, the creativity that shows in the human caring for and correcting of the most persistent of personal and social problems. Wieman's creative good is the important and helpful analogue for the Buddhist notion of sunyata. In both views is the appeal that thinking serve the emerging wholeness of living, and that it do so with realistic nerve and a meditative commitment to what transforms us as we cannot individually and socially transform ourselves. It is in this sense that the coming together of creative good and sunyata might provide the suggestive lure for the kind of desirable human experience for the

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40 Personal letter, Kendra Smith to Laura Wieman, Berkeley, California, used with permission of recipient and sender.

41 My most recent essay on this shared emphasis is, "Buddhism and Wieman on Suffering and Joy," in *Buddhism and American Thinkers*, ed., Kenneth K. Inada and Nolan P. Jacobson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 90-110.

coming of life of the whole earth in which both Oriental and Western traditions must necessarily play an important part.

Some people will find it impossible not to believe that this analysis and understanding of good in Wieman and in Buddhism is a pious wish, a mere strain of human volition, a reckless romantic impulse, or a blind and desperate act of faith. To these people and to others who might be naturally inclined to draw these and similar conclusions, let it be said that the discipline and rigor required in the pursuit of this kind of good, by direct and repeated admission of the many writers in the Buddhist tradition and by Wieman, is demanding beyond verbal explanation. Moreover, in both points of view, it is declared, and not at all without evidence and justification, that reality of the good is just this way in all of its positive possibilities and actualities.

Henry Nelson Wieman is America's "Process Theologian." As such, his thought represents an American analogue for, and involvement with, some of the most important themes in Buddhism, especially in its Mahayana tradition. The good for which he spent so much time and energy in his lifetime is profoundly illustrative of the good expressed throughout the various traditions of Buddhism. Such cross-cultural confluence is extremely important, for it enables us to speak of the Wieman-Buddhist perspective of compassionate interchange in a divided world that is in the midst of a great struggle for its very life. To this immense struggle, both Buddhism and Wieman address themselves with penetrating insight and tender fellow feeling.

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