Inter-Religious Experience: Method and Application*

Yo Hamada
McGill University, Kyoto University

There are various types of experience where human beings relate to multiple religions and cultures. I propose to call such experience "inter-religious experience." I divide this experience into three components: *motivations* of inter-religious experience, *changes* of one's religious sensitivity caused by it, and the subsequent *effects* of those changes. In this preliminary study, I shall focus on and analyze the motivational stage. I have further divided this motivational stage into two broad types: motivation by religion or culture, and motivation by factors other than religion and culture. In the first case: motivation can be based on one's own religion; on another religion; or on the religion of one's familial and cultural context, such as a relative's religions. In the second case, the motivation for inter-religious experience can be the result of a cultural environment that is different from one's own religion.

The concept of inter-religious experience should be viewed as a subject independent from "religious experience," which has had a long history in the field of religious studies. The concept of inter-religious experience could be useful to reveal the extent to which multiple relig-

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ions and cultures impact individuals and families. If we examine the human experience related to multiple religions, perhaps we can discover previously hidden religious or cultural conditions and cultivate a new feeling of further commonality, or at least sensitivity to our own religion with respect to other religions. Because many aspects of inter-religious experience are not *a priori* and absolute, we can study it empirically. To do so, we should develop such a program of study that, until now, has been absent in the fields of religious studies and studies of interfaith dialogue.

One such empirical method for the study of inter-religious experience is to dig deeply into literature: autobiographies, diaries, letters, and memoirs. We can attempt thereby to extract the experience of religious, philosophical, and social leaders, who have significantly influenced their societies. Another way is to collect information regarding inter-religious experience through direct interviews. In this article, I utilize both sources. First, I will analyze the writings of Kanzō Uchimura, and second, the transcripts from interviews with staff members and participants in the Elijah School and the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI).

1 Religious and Cultural Plurality

1.1 Uchimura's Two Religions

Many people during the emergence of modern Japan experienced the conflict that occurs when two religions or two cultures come together. In this case, it was the collision of Japanese religious traditions and Christianity, and of Japanese culture and Western culture.[1] Kanzō Uchimura (1861-1930), a prominent intellectual during the modernization of Japan, could not help facing this issue directly. In 1884, he traveled to North America and was troubled by the reality of this Christian country. The United States was a country dominated by free market economy, crime, racial discrimination, and a lack of trust and security. As a result of his experience with this culture, Uchimura cursed his own Christian faith and envied his grandmother's religious tradition; the syncretistic fusion of Shinto and Buddhism which has at least 1300 years of history:

> O heaven, I am undone! I was deceived! I gave up what was really Peace for that which is no Peace! To go back to my old faith I am now too overgrown; to acquiesce in my new faith is impossible. O for Blessed Ignorance that might have kept me from the knowledge of faith other than that which satisfied my good grandma! It made her industrious, patient, true; and not a compunction clouded her face as she drew her last breath. Hers was Peace and mine is Doubt; and woe is me that I called her an idolater, and pitied her superstition, and prayed for her soul, when I myself had launched upon an unfathomable abyss, tossed with fear and sin and doubt. One thing I shall never do in future: I shall never defend Christianity upon its being the religion of Europe and America. (Jonathan X^2 (Uchimura) 1895, 105)

He describes the inner dialogue between his grandmother's faith (religious tradition in Japan) and the Christianity of his youth. Despite the exclusivity demanded by his Christian faith, he could not deny that his grandmother's life had beauty and virtue. He had already committed to Christianity too deeply, however, to throw it away and return to his grandmother's faith. This intense mental conflict left him unsatisfied with or unable to participate in either tradition. Uchimura's conflict was motivated by the cultural context of North America and the religion of his family members, particularly his grandmother. The constant mediation of this conflict would last the remainder of his life.

Though he subsequently redefined his faith in Jesus while a foreign student at Amherst College, the problem of the two faiths he experienced was not a Christian identity crisis nor a process of further conversion motivated by Christianity, but a different type of anguish. It was a type of anguish conceived by a person who grew up in a Japanese religious tradition, encountered Christianity in Japan, and who then happened to encounter the predominantly Christian culture of North America. This inter-religious anguish must be considered quite different from mental religious conflicts experienced by Christian converts who grew up in the West, exposed only to the Christian tradition.

1.2 Japanese and Western Culture

The issue of two cultures—Japanese and Western—lies behind Uchimura's mental conflict of two faiths. Modern Japan has continued to

import and to be significantly shaped by Western culture. This tendency to import continues even today as Japanese attitudes shape themselves by using Western-produced terms (to be exact, their translation into *kanji* or transliteration into *katakana*), such as *shūkyō* (religion) or "identity" and "post-modernism."

Western culture is largely based upon the cultures of Greece and Rome, and the Judeo-Christian religions. These are the sources where the West often finds ideas for change and reform when facing difficulty. It is not important whether intellectuals and leaders who lead the reformation are believers of Judaism or Christianity. Even if they are agnostics, they still share the same cultural sources and reconstruct themselves based on the same foundations as those who follow the religious traditions of Western culture.

Where can the Japanese find the ideas for change when they face their own problems? It is almost impossible to ignore Western terminology, or escape from it, because it has been present since the Meiji period (1868-1912) and has become an intrinsic part of Japanese culture. Such terminology is deeply connected with its source, or the culture that originally produced it. Though Meiji intellectuals for the most part tried to import *only* the terminology of the West, they were consciously or unconsciously influenced by Western ways of thinking. So long as Japanese people continue to use Western terminology, sooner or later, they must confront the problems inherent in Western culture. They, therefore, must reflect upon its sources. On the other hand, if the Japanese ignore the sources of their own culture, they cannot fundamentally solve their problems. Difficulties experienced are conditioned by both the Japanese and Western cultural traditions. To reflect only on Western sources would address certain aspects of Japanese problems, those that are conditioned by Western culture. But such one-sided reflection could not provide the meaningful dialogue necessary to impact and improve Japanese society. It may seem that the Japanese have two different choices: to look to either Western or Japanese cultural sources. But, in reality, both sources are necessary for finding real solutions to modern Japanese problems.

We can now apply this necessity of dealing with two cultures to the mental conflict Uchimura experienced. In Uchimura's case, the fact

that he was Japanese and Christian prompted him to be conscious of the problem of two religions, and two cultures. His intense conflict contained something—something that was not explained in terms of simple "religious experience"—that makes modern Japanese people respond and reflect, whether they call themselves Agnostic, Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, or believers of the New Religious Movements.

1.3 Multiple Religions and Multiple Cultures

The problem of two religions, or two cultures, is not limited to Japan. Similar problems have arisen in many other areas of the world that were confronted by Western modernization. In fact, Western culture also has its own conflicts as a result of modernization. People in every culture, then, have increasingly faced occasions where they must deal with other religions and cultures in such a way that they cannot presuppose the priority of their own religions and cultures. The popularity of Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Studies is a reflection of this situation. At McGill University, for example, the departments of Jewish and Islamic Studies exist independent from the Faculty of Religious Studies. At the same time, the Western-dominated faculties of Religious Studies are being influenced, and in some cases, absorbed into Cultural Studies, which focuses on cultural area, region, and nation. As the Western academy faces other religions and cultures then, there is a movement towards a pluralistic division of study based on the model of Cultural Studies and away from monolithic, topic-oriented study.

Western academics reflect upon the sources of their religions and cultures and adapt themselves as far as possible. Non-westerners make use of the legacy and the trend of the Western academies as a means, and at the same time, they redefine and cultivate the sources of their own religions and cultures. However, the present world situation is extremely complicated. Many nation-states do not consist of one religion or culture. Religions and cultures cannot help interacting with each other, due to rapid innovations in communication and information technology, the globalization of the market economy, as well as immigration and transportation. Consequently, if we look at Uchimura's mental conflict today from a modern global point of view, we can call

it a conflict of religious and cultural plurality, and not simply a conflict between Japan and the West.

2 Inter-Religious Experience

2.1 Concept and Method: "Religious Experience" vs. "Inter-Religious Experience"

The question of religion and culture presses upon people more keenly within situations of plurality. In this plurality, the most appropriate resources by which we understand the richness and difficulty of human life are the particular experiences of people such as Uchimura, people who cannot but stand between one religion and another, or one culture and another. There are various types of experience where human beings relate to multiple religions and cultures. I will call such experience "inter-religious experience."

Whereas "religious experience" is a mainstream concept within Religious Studies, "inter-religious experience" has not been established as an academic term. The varieties of inter-religious experience, beyond the experience of a single tradition, have not been studied consistently. The word "inter-religious" has been used primarily as a description of dialogue between religions; and inter-religious dialogue has usually meant conferences between specific religious leaders and groups, or theological and philosophical disputes among specialists. However, if we depart from the conferences and disputes and instead apply this term to ordinary human experience, we find many cases where people relate to multiple religions on a day to day basis. I hold that this "inter-religious experience" should be viewed as a subject independent from "religious experience," and considered worthy of study and analysis.

When we study inter-religious experience, the problem of methodology arises. We need to somehow extract inter-religious experience from the whole of human experience in order to study it. How then should we study such plural experience? Approaches such as the analysis of case examples via a typological model is quite useful. William James employed this method in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* However, whereas James collected and analyzed "religious experience,"

we need to collect and analyze cases where people are involved in multiple religions. Though James considered the experience of the conversation between humans and the "unseen" (James 1902, 61-89), we would like to take up a somewhat different experience. There are personal, sociocultural, and historical situations where, regardless of the human relationships with the "unseen" to which James referred, human beings must find a way through difficulty by being in relation with people of other religions and cultures. One hundred years have passed since *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was published, and since that time the opportunities for multicultural and multi-religious experience have increased. The problems involved in studying inter-religious phenomena are more difficult than the ones faced by James. Therefore, we must be careful while using his method of case examples. We should not construct a definition of inter-religious experience directly from James's notion of religious experience, but rather consider our new term independently.

The concept of religious experience has been one of the main notions in the field of religious studies since its emergence. Religious studies investigates religious experience as it exists within various world religions and their histories. However, the attempt by scholars of religion to try to presume original "religious" factors in religions and to, therefore, emphasize religious experience, is currently being questioned in the West (Proudfoot 1985; Sharf 1998). This skepticism has prompted my study of "inter-religious" factors. For instance, we see systematic critiques of religious experience in Wayne Proudfoot's work. Recent work in psychology and the philosophy of mind shows the extent to which our ascriptions of emotions to ourselves and to others and our identification of bodily and mental states depend on complex sets of beliefs and grammatical rules. Proudfoot says, "With the idea of religion as an experiential moment irreducible to either science or morality, belief or conduct, Schleiermacher sought to free religious belief and practice from the requirement that they be justified by reference to nonreligious thought or action and to preclude the possibility of conflict between religious doctrine and any new knowledge that might emerge in the course of secular inquiry." However, "such moments of experience are clearly dependent on the availability of particular con-

cepts, beliefs, and practices." These are not simple inner states identifiable by acquaintance, as Friedrich Schleiermacher and others suggest. This kind of program cannot be carried through as Schleiermacher envisioned it (Proudfoot 1985, xiii - xv). There is no commonly accepted theory of religious experience, though all scholars do not always or necessarily agree with Proudfoot's critiques. The recent criticism and disagreement among scholars regarding the very definition of "religious experience" indicates the need for the development of new and different ways to explore religious phenomena. The concept of inter-religious experience may reveal, and thereby inform and improve, the extent to which our religious experience depends on our own and other religions and cultures. Through an examination of how we relate to multiple religions we can also discover our own hidden religious or cultural conditions and assumptions. This new self-awareness can be used to cultivate a feeling of shared understanding and universality—if such universality exists—or at least develop sensitivity to our own religion in relation to others.

2.2 Study and Analysis

When we apply the concept of inter-religious experience to case examples of people who are involved in multiple religions, we must consider the source and means used to choose case examples. One source is literature describing inter-religious experience, such as autobiographies, diaries, letters, and memoirs. We can extract the experience of those individuals who have left such a written record. Many of those individuals are religious, philosophical, and cultural leaders who have greatly influenced their societies. Another source is direct interviews.

Both methods of inquiry have not been employed extensively in religious studies and studies of inter-religious dialogue. As religious and cultural plurality has come to the surface in the post-Cold War era, religious studies has increasingly tended toward historical and cultural approaches that focus on one or two religions during short periods or over small areas. Theological and philosophical studies of inter-religious dialogue have become very detailed. It seems almost impossible to grasp the total character of the phenomena where human beings relate to multiple religions. This trend is also reflected in the interna-

tional conferences on inter-religious dialogue. The more complicated the multicultural situation becomes, the more we must focus on these phenomenological aspects of inter-religious experience *before* discussions of particular doctrines, theologies, or religions. We must first understand the scope and characteristics of the experience of people who are committed to multiple religions. Prior to such a study of inter-religious experience, we should define the boundaries of our analysis. We should strive, however, to avoid the insertion of ready-made, abstract theories into our analysis and use a moderately flexible model, which will adapt as the study develops.

As a preliminary model, I divide inter-religious experience into three components: the *motivation* to engage in inter-religious experience, the *changes* in one's religious sensitivities caused by it, and the *effects* of those changes. For my analysis, I will draw upon interviews with staff members and participants in the Elijah School and the Inter-religious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI). I will focus on the motivational component of the inter-religious experiences or, in other words, the reasons why people engage in multiple religions.

3 An Example of Extraction and Analysis

3.1 New Types of Inter-religious Organizations in Jerusalem: The Elijah School and the ICCI

In Israel and the Palestinian Autonomous Region, there exist at least 70 organizations that are involved in inter-religious dialogue. Among these, the Elijah School (1997-) and the ICCI (Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel) (1991-) were established in order to seek new strategies for inter-religious dialogue. The Elijah School focuses on the academic aspect of inter-religious dialogue and aims to build a consistent academic program in partnership with universities in North America. The ICCI includes 70 interfaith organizations as council members and acts as a network among them in order to promote the sharing of information and mutual cooperation. The ICCI also attempts to increase awareness and educate people in the society of Israel through religious and racial dialogue. In the severe and complex situation of the Middle East, it is not clear to what extent people in these organizations

will achieve their goals. But their actions undoubtedly represent new types of inter-religious dialogue.

In the Elijah School Program, founded by Rabbi and university professor Alon Goshen-Gottstein, scholars and students—both local and from abroad—live together under the same roof for 17 days and experience an intense, high quality, interfaith education. Whereas almost all interfaith dialogues are symposia and conferences that last several hours to, at most, a few days, a program of such length and coherence stands out. The program includes academic lectures from morning to evening, with accompanying discussions. There are many opportunities for experiential learning where participants visit Jewish, Christian, Armenian, and Muslim quarters within the Old City, and meet with religious local leaders: the Rabbis, Bishops, and Imams, who live in Jerusalem. Lecturers, themselves, receive an interfaith education by attending other specialists' lectures and by joining the many other events. The Elijah School Program also includes Eastern religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism. Participants are not confined to the perspective of monotheism. Alon Goshen-Gottstein holds that because of the keen interest in the study of Eastern religions and the potential of an alternative perspective that can complement on going discussions, the Elijah School will strive to have representation of different Eastern religious traditions.

The Elijah School and the ICCI are suitable venues for us to extract the human experience of multiple religions through interviews. This experience is usually difficult to extract in other short-term inter-religious dialogues. In the Elijah School Program, where participants experience academic dialogue together for 17 days, an observer can join the participants, create opportunities for asking about personal religious experiences, and come in contact with delicate problems across multiple religions.[3] Moreover, the experiences of the ICCI director, who has been involved in many organizations, have been extremely valuable.

I conducted the interviews during the second half of the 2000 program of the Elijah School (31 July to 16 August 2000).[4] For the interviews, I prepared a questionnaire with only basic questions,[5] rather than systematic ones, in order to let the participants describe inter-

religious experience in their own words. I also was careful to have participants speak freely, without interruption. I recorded 14 interviews, including people from each represented religion (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism), each lecturer, as well as the ICCI director. Due to limited space, I will only quote a small sampling of these interviews.

3.2 Extraction and Analysis of Inter-Religious Experience

When we look at human experience related to multiple religions in terms of the motivational stage, we can largely divide it into two broad types. One is based on motivation from religion or culture and the other is on motivation by factors other than religion and culture. The former can be further divided into three sub-types: motivation based on one's own religion; motivation based on another religion; and motivation based on familial and cultural context, such as relatives' religions or a cultural environment that is different from one's own religion. In the following discussion, I will analyze experiences of staff members and participants of the Elijah School and the ICCI using these ideal types. (I indicate my subsidiary questions by "{", the words I added by "[", and the place I cut the speech because of limited space by "...")

3.2.1 Type Based on One's Own Religion

Peter Drag, originally from Poland and studying both Catholic theology and Judaism in Jerusalem, is interested in interfaith issues in order to deepen his own Catholic belief:

> I came here in order to know more, in order to know. So I think that the key issue is in order to know... Everything is connected about knowing, about knowing something about the other religions. So not being ignorant. But you see, also it's very important not to get confused with other religions. Before coming to such dialogue, I think that it's very essential for one to be very much involved in your religion, to know where you are, to know why you are coming to such a dialogue and what you want to get out of this dialogue... *Shoah* [a Hebrew word for the Holocaust] took place in Poland. Very strong sometimes. A lot of parts took a place in Poland. When I was living in my hometown, you pass by the empty synagogues, empty places, and really no one really knows too much about those people who used to live here... I think the most important point is that what the Pope says, I mean for the future, of course, it is the most

> important work, we have to work on our anti-Semitism on our Christian side, but also, on Jewish side they have to work on the anti-Christianity... So that is probably the most important point. Because if we look for our theology of course by learning Judaism you can learn more about your own faith. But they cannot say this about Christianity. So that is very difficult. So the dialogue is really rather on the level of tolerance, learning tolerance, and not spreading certain prejudices about each other. (Drag)

Drag continues to accept other religions as objects of knowledge. Since Vatican II (1962-65), the Catholic Church and the Pope have taken an interest in dialogue with other religions. Drag strongly supports this dialogue. The Roman Catholic policy of dialogue is largely a result of the problems in Christianity's relationship with Judaism and the tragic history of the Holocaust.

A young Islamic scholar, Syed Akbar Hyder, speaks about the dialogue between Islam and Judaism:

> Jerusalem has been an extremely important issue for Muslims because one of the most important things that unite the Muslim communities is their sympathy, if not outright affection, for the Palestinian cause. It's our hope that Palestinians are dealt with in a just manner within this city. And it's a cause extremely close to our hearts. And coming to Jerusalem is a very difficult decision for Muslims. For any Muslim I think. Because in many ways when you come to Tel Aviv, and when you enter Israel, and all the questions that they ask of you and things like that: In a city that according to the United Nations is illegally occupied by Israel. And then to go through these different stages and deal with it. It's a very difficult thing. So I always hope that although faiths are coming together, religions are coming together, this should not be some cosmetic thing... I know a lot of people say that in interfaith dialogues, politics should be kept out, but when it comes to dialogue between Judaism and Islam, leaving politics out is a very difficult issue. It's impossible. (Hyder)

Hyder's words criticize superficial dialogues of religions. His sympathy for the Palestinian people, many of whom are Muslims, makes him conscious of the necessity for serious dialogues between Islam and Judaism.

North American theologian, Harvey Cox, explains the details of an experience in Japan, when he, a Baptist, and his wife, a Jew, were given a Shinto blessing for their unborn baby:

> When we were in Japan 15 years ago, my wife Nina and myself, she was already expecting Nicolas, so she was pregnant. And we noticed that there was a Shinto shrine in Tokyo for mothers who were expecting babies... And my wife said to me, "We should go and have a blessing for our child we're expecting and for me during the birth," and so on. And I said, "Well, I don't know about that." (Smile). And I thought about it in a rather careful way. I was sure that God was saying to me, "Of course. Why not?" So we did, we went in and there was a, you probably know the Shinto blessing. And it was wonderful. We met some people there, some other mothers and we couldn't speak with them because they were speaking Japanese... I don't remember the name of the Shrine. It's too long ago. But it was a feeling that I'm a Christian, she's Jewish, there was a Shinto Shrine, I'm sure some of the people there were not Shinto, as in Japan you never know. And yet we all have this common experience of expecting a child. Even if you're the father and you're not actually carrying the child, you're still hoping and expecting that everything will be OK and we help each other. And all these mothers were there and they were smiling and welcoming us as part of this. (Cox)

In this experience, the "voice" from his god was the reason why Cox accepted the blessing for the coming baby in the different religion or culture of Shinto. The characteristic of this experience is that he did not think of the other religion (Shinto) as an object of knowledge, as Drag did above. The name of the Shinto shrine did not especially interest him and neither was there direct communication with the Japanese women. What was important was that Cox and his wife shared a feeling of hope for the expected infants with Japanese women who gathered in the shrine. There Christianity, Judaism, Shinto, and shared human experience were all essential factors, forming the sense of unity he felt. In Cox's words: "It was a very, very touching reminder we have a common humanity under all of this. It was very memorable." This story expresses well a freshness and a sense of security that humans feel when they encounter other religions and cultures with the support of their own god. This has been burned into his memory as a clear feeling.

3.2.2 Type Based on Another Religion

Let us now examine the type, motivation based on another religion. Hyder is a Muslim who, during his adolescence, moved from India to Texas, USA. After he moved, he was surrounded by Christians. The

problem of how he should explain his own religion when he faced questions from Christians is foundational to his dialogue experience:

> I was born in the late 1960s in the south Indian city named Hyderabad. And I went to school there till 8th grade. And then I moved to the United States. I was born in a very pious Shî'a Muslim household. So I come from a Shî'a Muslim family and I was very close to my grandmother. And when I was about fourteen years old, I moved to the United States. And I did much of my high school in the United States. Being a Muslim in a country where, at least in a city, the majority of which was Christian, I always felt that I had to explain my religion to others, and at the same time, I needed to understand what other people were going through. Hence, I started interfaith dialogue very early in my life. Because people had lots of misunderstandings about Islam. I grew up, part of my life I was in Texas. And there would be, you know, Christians there asking me if I believe that Jesus was the Son of God. And I would first say no. Then, before I moved on to explain what the Muslim view of Jesus was, they would condemn me to hell. (Smile.) And so I really could not, you know, explain. And so that really made me think that we, you know, we really need to sit together and share our common experiences and not be so self absorbed... I had friends who were Jewish, and Christian, and Hindu at junior high school. You know, we always talked about our religious experiences... My sister eventually came to the school, too. So we both were, I think, the only two practicing Muslims. (Hyder)

If one belongs to a minority and does not understand the majority's religion (Christianity), one cannot explain one's religion (Islam) properly to the others. Questions and oppression from adherents of other religions motivate the desire to understand the other religion, which urges one to reflect continuously.

Joseph Mithuraj, who is a theology professor from southern India, lives surrounded by Hindus. Though he is a Christian, he is deeply and variously involved in Hinduism with Hindus as he is a leader in his community:

> We live in a street where the majorities are Hindus. We are the only Christian family in that street. So Hindus know us, we know them very easily. And what happens is in my house we have prayer meetings. Three times in a week. Hindus come. We read Bible, then we pray. Hindus come mostly for prayer. People who have problems in life. I give them advice and encouragement in prayer. We don't ask them to become Christians. It's up to them. But they sing songs with us, you know, Chris-

> tian songs. And there are many secret Christians. See, some of them come from business families. They don't want to openly, publicly, announce that they are Christians. So they are secretly Christians. They will give offering to the church but they will not publicly announce they are Christians. But there are some who told us, "No, we want to become Christians"... We have meetings on every Wednesday and every Sunday. And we have fasting prayer on every Friday, which mostly women attend. Women attend and people just pour tears, you know, and they pray. People involved in several problems, domestic violence... We belong to a community. See, caste plays an important part here. We belong to a particular caste, which is a highly influential caste. (Mithuraj)

When one has daily contact with people who belong to other religions, like this case, the religious sensibilities of others cannot remain something abstract.

In universities where students have various religious backgrounds, teachers can be influenced by a pluralistic environment:

> I think the thing that most inspired me to become active in interfaith programs and activities has been the contact with my students. Because I have students at Harvard from a number of different countries and from a number of kind of religious traditions: Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, sometimes Hindus—not as many—Christians of course, and in getting to know them, and finding out more about them, I was motivated to do something a little more formal, in an organized nature. I don't think of results of a single turning point. I think it was a gradual process in which I became more interested in other people and in their own faith traditions and I began looking for opportunities to, and I started twenty or more years ago. (Cox)

Teachers feel this diversity in such environments as North American universities, where students of various religious and cultural backgrounds gather. The situation is very different from universities in other regions, like those in Japan, that do not have such diversity. Conversely, students could also be influenced by their professors' religion. Vasvudha Narayanan, who is a scholar of Hinduism, was born in Madras, India. She became interested in both her own and other religions because of the influence of Western scholars:

> I read a book by a German scholar on Hindu philosophy... I liked it very much... In India we don't have a religion department, so I studied in the

> Philosophy department. But by that time I started to understand my own roots, the Śrī-Vaiṣṇāva tradition. When I started my Ph.D, I met a professor from Harvard University, John Carman. He was the director of the Center for the Study of World Religions. He came to India. And he was an expert in my religion, in my particular tradition, *sampradāya*. And I was very impressed as to how he was so committed and yet knew so much about my own religion, although he was Christian... And he invited me to come to Harvard. And I became a student in the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard in 1975. I took courses in comparative religions. And I began to study others... For instance, when I studied about Pure Land Buddhism and *Jyōdo Shinshū*, I was so excited because the difference between *Hōnen* and *Shinran* was very similar, the difference they had, to the difference of my own tradition. So I realized that I could learn to ask questions and understand my own faith, but also understand other people through their eyes, not just myself. (Narayanan)

3.2.3 Type Based on Familial and Cultural Context

Next, let us consider a more complex type of inter-religious experience. Involvement in multiple religions emerges as a family issue when couples, who have different religions, marry:

> My wife is Jewish and we both are serious about our faith. So we didn't want to change. And we have...a marriage in which we each respect and participate in the other's traditions in so far as we can. We have one child. He is thirteen. Because in Judaism the child of the Jewish mother is considered to be raised Jewish. I think I agree he should be raised Jewish. With appreciation for Christianity, still thinking himself as Jewish. That's what we do. (Cox)

Interfaith marriages require that persons acknowledge and respond to their spouse's religion. However, a another problem is introduced when the couple must decide how they should hand down their religious traditions to their children. For Cox, his son's religion is becoming more a part of himself.

Elementary school teacher, Virginia Freedman is from a Jewish lineage, but her mother was a Catholic. She had long been interested in connecting with her Jewish roots. But it was after one of her parents recently passed away that she became more linked to her family's Jewish religious background:

> I am from Durham, North Carolina, which is in the United States. I am an elementary school teacher at a Montessori School and I am planning to attend graduate school... I belong to the Jewish tradition. But I have been raised with the Jewish tradition and with the Catholic tradition in America. I was born in America and I consider myself an American. I guess my grandparents were from Eastern Europe. I am Jewish, which is an ethnic category. {When did you convert to Judaism?} When I was, um, twenty. I have always been interested in interfaith dialogue because of my background. Even though I am not a practicing Christian, I have been involved in a lot of, I guess, activism with Christians and I've worked in Christian schools before, even though I'm Jewish. And I was interested in pursuing this, you know, from an academic context... I've always been interested in converting to Judaism, but it's a formal process that you have to do, you have to study for a year with a Rabbi. So I guess my turning point was [when I was 9 years old]...I was taking care of one of my parents a lot. I remember feeling pretty beleaguered... I mean one of my parents was ill...So that's probably why I did become more interested in religion. {At that time you were a Christian when you were 9 years old?} Yeah. Well, it was always an issue because my mother was very religiously Catholic and most of the family that I knew were Jewish in the neighborhood...I was just always really attracted to Jewish tradition even though probably the only person that was really religious in my family was Catholic...I enjoyed...their [Judaism's] books when I was 9 years old... One thing that has helped me become more committed to Judaism is that one of my parents has recently died... I feel like the Jewish tradition really respects that... part in an adult's life of when their parent dies. That you are supposed to be a little more.... That it's taken very seriously and it gives a lot of dignity. (Freedman)

If we grow up within multiple religions and choose one religion when we become adults, there can be an inner dialogue with the other religion. In Mithuraj's case, a memory of his ancestor's conversion affects his attitude to his own multiple religions, Hinduism and Christianity:

> My ancestors, from our father [my father's] side, in 1877 forty families became Christians. And the two leaders were responsible in the making those forty families into Christian. And those two leaders were my ancestors. They were the village chiefs, leaders of the community. So when they became Christians, the forty families, they handed over temples where they worshiped, Hindu temples, to Christian church... So it's one of the great and dramatic mass conversions in the Indian history. I have not read [of] any such... That's my father's side. My mother's side, I think almost around the same time, 1874 I think, my great- great-grandfather became a Christian. Not as a result of mass conversions but through his

> personal effort that he became a Christian... I don't know why forty families all of a sudden became Christians... I interviewed one [of the] oldest [men] in the village just last year. He told me maybe it was because of certain legal problems that the community was in. In order to get out of the legal problems they all switched over to Christians. Because when they became Christians after about ten years time most of them went back to [being] Hindus... Probably part of social reasons they became Christians then later went back to Hinduism. But they still left the temple to be the church. They didn't take over the temple or anything. They could have done that if they wanted to. (Mithuraj)

When we pay attention to family, the problems of multiple religions extends to marriage, relationships between parents and children, and lineage. Even when we try to choose one religion and cut out the other at the time of marriage in a mature, and a personal conversion, the trace of the other religion might remain and effect us unconsciously. More seriously, Mithuraj tries to live as a Christian, the more closely he encounters his religious and culture context, the core of which is Hinduism:

> Although I am a Christian, I am still a Hindu inwardly. There is a lot of Hindu-ness within me. So I search and ask myself what is that Hinduness, which I try to express in a Christian way, you know, faith in Christ. So I have the two strong: Christian experience and the Hindu spirituality. So both dialogue within me consciously and unconsciously. So both are taking a shape within me as a result of cross fertilization. It's not that I have accepted a western dogma in order to show myself a Christian... I know them. I have studied them. But my Christian experience is based on Indian spirituality. And my experience is mainly in tune with the realities in India['s] sociopolitical, economic realities. (Mithuraj)

This is similar to the case of Kanzō Uchimura mentioned earlier. After graduation from Amherst College, he also choose to enter a theological school and later, to leave that school. Uchimura left the school without completing the doctoral program and went back to Japan. In Uchimura's mind, as in Mithuraj's mind, Western theology remained the merely external knowledge and did not apply to real life directly. Mithuraj identifies himself as neither a Christian nor a Hindu and seriously continues his inner dialogue. As a result, he cultivates an atti-

tude of tolerance such that he does not question others' religious affiliation.

3.2.4 Type Based on Factors other than Religion and Culture

Here I would like to take up a case that it is difficult to consider based on religious and cultural reasons: the type where motivation is based on factors other than religion and culture. Richard Hayes, a scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, lives in Montreal. Based on his experience of encountering many Jewish students, Hayes supposes that many Jews tend to be attracted to Buddhism partly because they are unable to believe in their God due to the Holocaust. Neither are they satisfied with racial nationalism and secularism. Moreover, Buddhism does not have a tragic historical relationship with Judaism, as do Christianity and Islam:

> {Why are so many Jews are interested in Buddhism?} I'm not sure. I've asked many of them. And some people tell me that they have not had much experience with religious side of Judaism. {Is it a kind of Orientalism?} I think partly there is...being interested in the Orient is very fashionable in the West. But I think for these people it's not so much that. Sometimes people have traveled. So I have one student who traveled in Nepal and she lived among people in Nepal and was just very attracted to the way they lived and to the way that they act with each other. And she felt that that was not part of her life before she went to Nepal. So she wanted to incorporate that into her life more... She was told her whole life about the importance of loving your neighbour, but nobody ever said how do you do this. So when she actually practiced Buddhism she saw that there are actually meditation exercises that people do that teach them how to love each other. So she said to me that her own Jewish background they preach and talk to her about, but Buddhism actually shows how to do, how to do these things. (Hayes)

Neither their own religion (Judaism) nor assertion of another religion (Buddhism) accounts for Jews approaching Buddhism. We should not think that this is the same situation as a person born in a Buddhist region, such as Thailand, who comes to experience and adhere to Buddhism. In this case, Buddhism is not part of the religious or cultural context of most Jewish people. In the Jewish quest for Buddhism, however, Jewish people may look back and learn about their own tradition.

The fact that many social problems cannot be solved within one religion or one culture can make human beings realize the necessity of inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious experience may be an important resource for the mutual solution of social problems. This is evident in the case of the ICCI director, Rabbi Ron Kronish:

> We founded this organization in 1991 on the night before the Gulf War. The reason that led a small group of us to do this was a feeling that there was a need in Israel for a voice for interfaith relations or understanding the other. And we didn't have a central voice that could work together with many different groups in order to do this. So the inspiration for it was a feeling among a number of people—Jews and Christians at the beginning—who felt that it was something missing. And it was important, especially here in Israel and here in Jerusalem, that there be a way for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to get together. Now, I would say that our motivation for doing this was a mixture of what you might call secular and religious reasons. When we got started, we invited people who were interested in understanding "the other" in Israeli society. So we brought to the organization, "the council," as we call it, different kinds of organizations. One kind was those who work in interfaith understanding, people who want to know about the other from a point of view of theology or faith or religious texts. And other group, we call it groups who work for Arab-Jewish coexistence in Israel, not necessarily from a religious perspective more from a cultural or even a national or ethnic perspective. Jews and Arabs need to share this land. Arabs usually tend to be Christian or Muslim. But Jews and Arabs tend to see each other as members of a people: the Jewish people, [and] the Arab people. So we tried to bring different perspectives together. Because we felt that if we're gonna to live together in the same country or in the same society, the same part of the world, we need to find some *modis for bandi*, for living together and understanding more about each other. (Kronish)

It is an unfortunate reality that tragic conflicts stir up hatred and fuel religious and racial identities. Mass media reports often conclude that conflict increases the tension among religions and races in the Middle East. In the case of the ICCI, however, the tension preceding the Gulf War and the crisis of increasing distrust among religions and cultures instead became a reason for establishing this new form of interfaith organization. "A central voice," which Kronish referred to, cannot be limited to one religion or one culture. Without such centrality, it

would be difficult to discover something able to resist the exclusion of one religion or race by another religion or race.

> I would say the inspiration was less a theological one and more of a practical one of a need to get to know people better in our own society. And our feeling is that there are many paths to do that. The religious path, as well as the inter-religious or we call it sometimes, inter-cultural. So we're interested in learning about, let's say, Arabs in this country in their diversity: Muslims, Christian Arabs, the different kinds of Christian Arabs, the different kinds of Muslims. Just as we expect that Muslims will want to learn, or Arabs will want to learn about Jews in their diversity and their complexity. (Kronish)

Although Kronish does not think of himself as very religious, he is highly interested in the issues of interfaith dialogue. If he did not have a fundamental respect for the three Middle Eastern religions, he could not work for coordinating so many organizations.

4 Problems and Prospects

When we try extracting the human experience of multiple religions, we come to understand that such experience can be found in many areas of people's lives. Multiple religions impact religious practice, family, education, social environment, politics, and so on. We must acknowledge this reality first before we can begin to analyze it. At this point, we need to collect more information and case examples for further analysis of inter-religious experience. We also need to note that, in actuality, the ideal types of motivation for inter-religious experience that I mentioned above often mix together and influence one another. For example, based on his experience of encountering many Jewish students at McGill University, Richard Hayes recounted the following:

> I think for me when I meet Jewish students who say they want to become Buddhists, then their families become very unhappy. And so...when they come to me and they talk to me, I try to find a creative way to help them continue their interest in Buddhist practice, meditation and also to find some way that they can reassure their family so their family doesn't suffer because they've changed. That for me is a very important reason for why I come to this conference because I want to understand better Jewish thinking, and Jewish emotions and the whole Jewish mentality. I really want to understand that. So I can help people who are interested in be-

> coming Buddhists. Sometimes I just tell them, "Don't become Buddhist. (Smile.) Just remain Jewish and you know, you don't have to be secret. You know, continue practicing meditation and just don't identify yourself too strongly." (Hayes)

Although Hayes' experience is precipitated by people of another religion, the motivation is from his own religion—he cannot ignore people who are interested in Buddhism—plays a significant role. Because Hayes is not only a scholar, but also a Buddhist practitioner, it is a serious concern for him as to how he should communicate with Jewish students who are personally interested in Buddhism. His guidance could seriously affect not only students, but also their families. In order to cope with such a situation, he needs both knowledge and experience of Judaism even if he himself specializes in Buddhism.

The final interview, with the Hindu scholar, Vasvudha Narayanan, further demonstrates the complexity of motivation:

> Many Hindus don't know enough about their own tradition. They don't think about belief. They are just, they learn without going deep into the religion. They go to a temple. They do the rituals. They take children. And they have things to do. That's it. The belief, doxology, is not important for them. So interfaith dialogue they don't understand because that is a Christian concept. Because it's in Christianity that belief is important and they think to understand us they must understand our beliefs. But Hindus don't know about their own beliefs. So what does it matter? For instance, in Atlanta or in Michigan they are asked to do it, religious dialogue, and they don't know what to say. So you know what they do? To understand other religions or to communicate with them, the Hindus of the temple will go to a Gospel Mission, a food service, and help to serve food or they will give meals for Thanksgiving. So work, they will work with other people for humanity, and they think that is good. But they don't know how to dialogue. So this is a dialogue of action. And that is more important for them. (Narayanan)

This kind of Hindu experience could not be represented well without the observation of a Hindu specialist like Narayanan. This case is based on Hindu characteristics and contains something in common with the sensibility of the Japanese women who welcomed Harvey Cox and his wife. Moreover, according to Narayanan's interpretation that Hindus work for "humanity," we might also categorize this as possess-

ing elements of motivation based on factors other than religion and culture.

Finally, though we cannot come to a conclusion in advance, our inquiry will be confronted with the most difficult question of defining the characteristics of inter-religious experience. I do not intend to propose that inter-religious experience is a concept limited to some specific phenomenon, in contrast to the phenomena of religious experience. If anything, I consider it a hybrid form, consisting of various human experiences. It is necessary for us to extract these complex phenomena as they are, and analyze them methodically. Further, because inter-religious experience is not *a priori* and absolute, we can study it and foster it.

Although I have mainly utilized interviews in this article, we can also extract personal experiences of religious or cultural figures from autobiographical literature. For example, we could consider M. K. Gandhi, who staked his life on the coexistence between Hindus and Muslims; Martin Luther King, Jr., who revived Gandhi's nonviolence in the Christian context; Mother Teresa, who nursed dying patients while respecting their own religions; and the Dalai Lama, who continues to make pilgrimages for religious and cultural reconciliation. Their unique experiences largely result from their encounters with multiple religions.

Notes

[1] Please note that I am not simply saying that Japanese religious traditions are *one*. Here I only call traditions like Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism, and others, by the term "Japanese religious traditions." I am not saying simply that Japanese culture is *one*, either. This comparison of the whole of Japanese religions is only possible when we contrast Japan with the West. If we were discussing the economic situation of Japan in relation to East Asia or Southeast Asia, a more pluralistic and detailed account of Japanese culture and religion would be appropriate. However, so long as Japan continues to be influenced by the West, we can not ignore the effect the West has on the *whole* of Japan.

[2] Uchimura wrote under the pen name of "Jonathan X" in his work *How I Became a Christian*.

[3] Conversely, it is almost impossible to conduct interviews that require a relationship of mutual trust between an interviewer and informants in such large interfaith conferences as World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), and Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR) because of their relatively short and systematized schedules. Supported by a research grant from the Japan Science Society, I was able to attend the international meetings of IARF (Vancouver) and WCRP (Amman, Jordan) in 1999. I discussed this very different forum of inter-religious experience in a research report for the Society.

[4] The number of members in the 2000 program was 30, most of whom were professors, scholars, and students. The specific religious breakdown was: 15 Christians, 10 Jews, 2 Buddhists, 1 Muslim, and 1 Hindu, and I myself am affected by the Japanese religious traditions of Shinto and Buddhism, as well as Christianity. Through my interviews, as suggested by the category of inter-religious experience, I realized that some members could not be identified exactly with only one religion.

[5] The following questions were used in the interview:

1. At first would you let me know your city, country (birth, nationality, and living place), occupation, institute, field of studies, and religious and ethnic background?

2. What kind of experience had inspired or stimulated you in order to join this interfaith program or before you have joined this program? If possible, would you let me know your personal experience from the four points of view? (If you experienced some kind of turning point before you have become to be interested in inter-religious issues, would you let me know it, too?)
    a) Secular Experience or reason
    b) Academic Experience: books, conference, etc.
    c) Religious Experience
    d) Inter-religious or Interfaith Experience
3. From the aspect of your own faith or religion, what do you feel would be the most important element for inter-religious coexistence including agnostics or secularists?

4. What kind of experience do you think or expect you can get through this program?
    a) Secular Experience
    b) Academic Experience
    c) Religious Experience
    d) Inter-religious or Interfaith Experience

Thank you very much for your warm heart, time and patience."

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