

One Person at a Time

IN February I traveled to Hong Kong along with representatives from many other countries where we had the pleasure to accompany SGI President Ikeda. At one of the meetings we attended, President Ikeda talked about his first trip to China in 1974. He said that after arriving in Hong Kong, he took a train and then crossed over to mainland China by foot. A young girl asked him, "Why have you come here?" Bending down to her, he said with a warm smile, "I came to see you."

When I heard that, I thought what a brilliant synthesis of the peace process. After all is said and done, doesn't world peace boil down to the actions of one person in relation to another person?

I think this is what makes SGI's movement for peace so unique; though operating globally, it begins when an idea takes root in one person's heart. The seed is then nurtured at neighborhood discussion meetings and during personal visits where we get to know one another.

The district is the ideal arena to nurture these humanistic bonds among people. We find that of the more than 400 letters written by Nichiren Daishonin that still exist, almost all were written, not to groups of people, but to individuals. He wrote to a mother whose child was suffering; to two brothers who were criticized by their father for their belief; to poor farmers threatened by the local government authorities due to their faith; to a samurai physician being ostracized by his boss and co-workers. Even the philosophical treatises he wrote were to people like Shijo Kingo and Toki Jonin.

IS it any wonder then that President Ikeda cherishes dialogue. I have seen him make friends with some of the world's leading thinkers, not by expounding the intricacies of Buddhism, but by talking with them about life. That's how he talked with Linus Pauling and Armand Hammer. And with Norman Cousins and Nelson Mandela. He has also been having ongoing dialogue with the prominent Hong Kong writer Jin Yong, who attended the 16th SGI World Peace Youth Culture Festival, one of several activities held during the SGI leader's visit in February. Their talks are now being serialized in the Japanese magazine *Ushio* and the Hong Kong magazine *Ming Pao Monthly*. While in Hong Kong, I also witnessed heartfelt dialogue between President Ikeda and Liu Zhongshu, president of one of China's most prestigious universities, who had traveled two thousand miles to Hong Kong to award the SGI president an honorary professorship. Mr. Liu spoke of his gratitude for President Ikeda's efforts to open the way for friendly China—Japan relations and his understanding and love for Chinese culture.

This reminds me of another anecdote President Ikeda shared while we were in Hong Kong that illustrates the Buddhist spirit of one-on-one dialogue. A farmer apparently arrived late for a banquet that Shakyamuni was attending. It seems that one of his cows couldn't be accounted for. By the time the farmer found his cow, made sure it was safe and got to the banquet, dinner was over. When the farmer arrived, Shakyamuni stopped his discourse in mid-sentence and insisted that the farmer be served immediately. The Buddha then very kindly waited until the farmer had thoroughly enjoyed his meal before continuing his talk.

LISTENING to these anecdotes and watching President Ikeda's behavior in Hong

Title: One Person at a Time

Subject: Living Buddhism 04/97 v.1 n.4 p.4 LB9704p04

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Keywords: Commentary Kosen-rufu Peace Person Practice Publisher Time

Kong, I rekindled my own determination to focus even more in the area where real peace begins, the heart of a single human.

In our discussion meetings, we come to understand peace by studying and talking with one another. We discover the unlimited value of a single human life. It is, in a way, the monthly “school” we attend where we study the great philosophy of peace and cultivate our heart-to-heart bonds. It is not something we find in mass demonstrations. Nor is it the jurisdiction of any leader.

Peace is about appreciating the dignity of a single human life. Peace finds expression in our prayer for human happiness and a peaceful world. Peace shows its results in our communities, our schools, our places of work, at the grassroots level—one life at a time. When you think about it, that is a perspective about life that is much richer than just a world without war.

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