

My Recollections
The Honorable Justice S. Mohan of India
By SGI President Ikeda

A kind heart is more than a coronet.” Justice S. Mohan of India inscribed these words on the flyleaf of a collection of his poems, *Random Reflections*, that he presented to me.

The Supreme Court of India is a great fortress defending the human rights of India’s 800 million people. Until 1995, Dr. Mohan was a judge of that court. He remains today, after retiring at 65, a leading figure in the world of law in India.

When he came to Japan last summer, Dr. Mohan traveled all the way to Gumma Prefecture as a guest speaker in the Culture Lecture Series sponsored by the *Seikyo Shimbun*. After his lecture, a young woman rose and said: “I have no father. But I am earnestly pursuing my dreams, proud to be a Soka Gakkai member. In the organization, the men’s division members are my fathers, and the women’s divisions members are my mothers. Just now in your lecture, you said: ‘When the atomic bomb fell on Japan, we in India wept. We did so because you, the people of Japan, were in our hearts. We always share every happiness and sadness with all of you in Japan.’ I was very moved by your words. May I then also regard the people of India as members of my family?”

“Of course you may,” replied Dr. Mohan. “Please do so by all means.” Then he paused for a moment, and continued: “As a matter of fact, I never knew my father, either. My father died the day before I was born. I only missed seeing him by a single day. I was brought up by my mother. Even so, I made myself useful to society as a judge on the Supreme Court. You must never forget, my dear young people, the greatness of mothers. Your mothers are the finest people in the world. The divine dwells in your mothers’ hearts.”

After the speech, as photographs were taken to commemorate the event, Dr. Mohan held the hand of this young woman and continued to offer words of heartfelt encouragement. “I pray,” he said, “that the heavenly deities protect you, that you have a wonderful life, that you find a wonderful husband and have wonderful children! I pray that all the blessings of this world rain down on you!”

Dr. Mohan sparked such wonderful encounters wherever he went. To a first-grade elementary school student, he said: “Please grow up to be a great person. When you are bigger, please come to visit me in India.” Another time he said to a student, “If you come to India, I will greet you as one of my dearest friends.”

Dr. Mohan’s compassionate heart sees a precious, divine essence in each and every individual. This is his religion — one that was taught to him by his mother. In a poem, he wrote:

*O Sweet Mother, no greater glory can I bring,
Through city, my name and fame ring.
I am the helper of the poor,
Friend of the sick,
Companion of the needy;
Neither halt, nor hesitate to help
Even if tumbled to poverty, nor reduced to pulp
This be thy religion —
You said without an end,
Humble ever will I be, ready always to bend.1*

For Dr. Mohan, religion is service to humanity, the science of the spirit and the exact opposite of dogma.

There are trails along which birds fly in the skies and orbits along which the stars travel in the heavens, but they are invisible to the human eye. There also exists a path for human beings to follow. In the same way, though invisible, there is an eternal, sacred Law, the Dharma, that pervades the cosmos and governs all existence.

This universal Law extends to countless distant planets, encompassing the vast infinity of space, while it is also embodied in the gentle sighing of the wind through the leaves in a golden autumn forest.

It is the poet who glimpses the soaring heights of the Dharma's song. Only the poet, like some highly sensitive audio device, can give voice to the eternal Law. Sometimes that song is as familiar and nostalgic as the music from a bamboo flute. Sometimes it is as relentless as leaping flames.

As far as Dr. Mohan is concerned, his poetry, his faith and his activities as a jurist to realize justice and moral good are all service to the eternal Law. Dr. Mohan said to me: "I have lived with the resolve to dedicate my life to others. Though kings, emperors and generals may strive to leave their mark on history, it is a different sort of person who lives on in people's hearts. It is those with a deep compassion and concern for humanity who win an undying place in people's affections."

After graduating at the head of his class at Madras University, he became an attorney. Eventually, at his mother's urging, he became a judge. "Though I earned a lot less as a judge than I did as an attorney," he said, "I was completely satisfied with my work." Not distracted for a moment by wealth or fame, Dr. Mohan fought for the triumph of justice.

What is justice?

The poet Rabindranath Tagore, whom Dr. Mohan highly respects, asserted that *civilization* is the contemporary word closest in meaning to that ancient Indian concept, Dharma. For *civilization*, we could perhaps substitute *morality*, *human rights* or *justice*. For Dr. Mohan, the indivisibility of human rights and justice is an inviolable, sacred decree.

According to Dr. Mohan, any nation that tramples on human rights, no matter how wealthy it might be, is barbaric and uncivilized. He offers a stern warning about Japan's state of affairs: Any country that violates freedom of religion will eventually violate all freedoms. Religious faith, the heart that seeks the great eternal truth transcending all petty desires, is the most civilizing power.

Dr. Mohan boldly asserts that a lawyer without compassion is deformed, and a human being without religion is a corpse. That has been his unchanging conviction and the attitude with which he has pursued his law career, he said. How can the law be made more humane? His cherished ideal is that laws should exist not to condemn but to save.

An American judge, who was Dr. Mohan's teacher at law school, always said that a judge must never think of himself as powerful. A judge must always be humble. When we are humble, a great human vista opens up and we can see things as they really are.

It is difficult indeed to judge one's fellow human beings. Of course, laws exist, but it is people who exercise them correctly or abuse them. Those who are aware of this tremendous difficulty of judging others inevitably seek a higher truth in which to ground their judgment.

The famous Japanese justice Masataro Miyake, in his book *Saiban no Sho* (A Judge's Reflections), wrote that the secret of passing sound judgment is to train oneself to renounce all subjectivity, whatever the case, and that prayer is a key to attaining that state of selflessness.

As a judge, Dr. Mohan has seen many real-life dramas played out before him. My friend

Dr. Krishna Srinivas, president of the World Poetry Society, wrote of Dr. Mohan: “From his noble seat of inviolable Justice, he observes the caravan of humanity march before him in all its textures — a deserted woman crying for succor; an unfortunate condemned to gallows for no crime of his; an orphan craving protection; a saintly being on the Cross; several times truth mauled and facing extinction — these have roused the reality in him to rise above fear or favour and deliver Justice from the inner recesses of his soul.”²

Some have not been pleased with the fact that Dr. Mohan praises the SGI at every opportunity. They have even warned him that, as a government employee, he should restrain his enthusiasm. But he is not to be intimidated. “I am a judge,” he said. “It is my job and my duty to say what is right is right.” What a powerful, committed and courageous response! Those who are kind and compassionate are strong. With his gaze firmly directed at the eternal, Dr. Mohan fears nothing.

He said: “I have served as a Supreme Court judge and a representative of the governor, but such social roles have nothing to do with one’s worth as a human being. All that concerns me now is how I can achieve a peaceful death. As a result, the only kind of people I am interested in are those who can help me improve myself as a human being.” If all leaders had such an attitude, the world would be transformed overnight.

In one of his poems, Dr. Mohan wrote:

*Who can conquer the world?
One whose heart is a fountain of kindness.
Who can conquer fate?
One who is wisdom’s mate.
Who can conquer death?
One whose deeds are kind till last breath.*³

When I asked him what his message to youth was, he answered in ringing tones: “Youth, love all humanity! Compassion can open the door of impossibility. Youth, give everything you have to the service of the people! Pay no attention to the insults or slanders others may heap on you!”

He breathes eternity, which makes him eternally young — a youthful warrior fighting forever for justice.

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1. Justice S. Mohan, “Oh, Sweet Mother” in *Wild Blooms* (Madras: Pooram Publications, 1982).
2. Preface to Justice S. Mohan’s *Genesis* (Madras: Poets Press India, 1981), p. 6.
3. Justice S. Mohan, “Who Can Conquer?” in *Wild Blooms*.