

## Heal the Sick Children

Since time began, it seems that little boys (and some little girls) in America have incorporated acts of violence and even genocide into their play activities, whether they call their game Cowboys and Indians, Army, or Cops and Robbers. This may appear normal to us. Kids will be kids, after all. Even if you refuse to buy Johnny a toy gun, that doesn't stop him from making an imaginary firearm out of any household object. Besides, it's just a game.

Then two boys in Arkansas turned their schoolyard into a shooting gallery, killing five people.

As incidents such as this one become more common, many of us are increasingly aware of the deep sickness of heart that pervades our society: the lack of empathy; the cheapening of human life; overwhelming feelings of powerlessness and alienation; increasingly frequent and disturbing expressions of rage.

These problems aren't confined to America. In Japan, a boy decapitated a classmate. In Scandinavia, a group of children kicked another child to death. In France, young thugs commit rape, torture and robbery with a sense of casual entitlement.

Truly, these are symptoms of a profound sickness that cannot be blamed on a single individual, family or culture.

From one point of view, it could be said that violence against and neglect of children is at an unprecedented high. The *Los Angeles Times* recently reported that more children were killed by their parents, family members or caretakers in 1996 than in the previous year, and serious, abuse-related injuries to children are on the rise. And global problems such as the growing child prostitution industry and female genital mutilation demonstrate that the lives of many young people are steeped in horror.

This also suggests that the world is full of disturbed, profoundly sick children of all ages.

The "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra (a portion of which we recite twice each day as part of our Buddhist practice) tells the story of a skilled physician who knows how to formulate medicines to cure all kinds of diseases. This physician has many children. One day, his children drink poison that makes them distraught with pain, and they fall writhing to the ground.

Due to the poison, some of his children are completely out of their minds, while others are not. All the children beg their father to cure them. Immediately, the father formulates a cure, saying, "Take it and you will quickly be relieved of your sufferings and will be free of all illness." Some of the children take the medicine and regain their health, while others refuse to take it because they are unable to perceive it as good.

So the father resorts to an expedient: he leaves home and sends a messenger to his children to announce that their father has died. In their inconsolable grief, the sick children realize that the medicine their father left is good. They take it and are healed, and the father returns.

The Buddha is analogous to the skilled physician and we, the people, are analogous to the sick children. In the depths of our grief and anguish, we seek medicine — we seek a teaching that will relieve suffering. "In this present age, people have ceased to live with powerful conviction based on sound philosophy," writes SGI President Ikeda. "People's life forces are waning and their spirits are ill.... As a result, deep in their hearts, people are searching for a philosophy based on the human being, a system of thought that thoroughly explains the potential and supreme worth of each person" (*Lectures on the "Expedient*

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*Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra, vol. 3, p. 49).*

Nichiren Daishonin taught that we live in the time of the Latter Day of the Law — which is believed to last 10,000 years and more — when Shakyamuni’s teachings lose their power and the original Buddha makes his advent to lead all people to enlightenment.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the original Buddha. It is the excellent medicine that cures all ills. And never before has it been more desperately needed. As Bodhisattvas of the Earth, our mission is to be the messengers to spread this teaching throughout the world, to cure ourselves and others of sickness.

An integral part of our mission is to cultivate in ourselves the qualities that are lacking in society: empathy and an appreciation for the value and dignity of life. As people come to feel powerless, it’s our mission to awaken ourselves and others to the inner power that all people possess. As people feel increasingly alienated, we are here to build community and harmony, to live with a recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings. And as rage is expressed in more disturbing ways, we are here to show that rage has an enlightened side. Anger can be transformed into a force for justice and good.

By propagating Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and by challenging ourselves to become the kind of people that we would like others to become, we will cure the sick children of the world.

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