

PUBLISHER'S COMMENTARY FREEING MOTHER EARTH

I grew up in the countryside, swimming and fishing in a clear stream, running with my friends in a grassy field and hillside near my home. Having been surrounded by nature every day of my childhood, I developed a love for it. Today the river in which I swam and fished is too contaminated for either. The field and hillside are now a development surrounded by busy highways. It's clear to me how increasingly important it is to protect our environment.

To make this awareness part of our everyday consciousness, it takes more than newspaper recycling or carpooling, although the impact of such efforts should not be discounted. Responsible treatment of our environment arises from a sound grasp of our relationship with nature. When we root our actions in a deep awareness of our profound relationship with nature, we are motivated to act toward our environment with a sense of appreciation and responsibility.

In his 1997 peace proposal, President Ikeda wrote:

It hardly need be said that environmental problems are not simply political, economic or technological issues that can be eliminated or alleviated by merely establishing wise methods of using valuable resources. I believe a way will be found out of our difficulties if we probe much deeper, questioning and redesigning the relationships of human beings to each other, of human beings to the environment, and of human beings to society as a whole. Now is the time to transform our civilization into one based on values premised on the principle of human dignity in the true sense. It is time for a shift in the fundamental perspective of each and every person in the world.

Neither Shakyamuni nor Nichiren Daishonin talked specifically about protecting the natural environment as a whole. This may well be because they lived in times and places when human populations and technology did not yet pose a significant threat in terms of pollution or depletion of the natural realm. Yet Shakyamuni taught against needlessly killing. And the Daishonin clearly and repeatedly links the condition of the land—which supports the ecosystem and human society—to the inner condition of human beings. In this regard, he wrote: “If the minds of the people are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 4).

More specifically, the Daishonin attributed disruption in the environment, in the external world, to a lack of order in the internal world of human beings. This internal disorder is characterized by the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness, also expressed as greed, hatred and delusion.

In modern terms, it is easy to see that human greed leads to ever-increasing consumption, placing a strain on natural resources and creating large amounts of pollution. Hatred obviously leads to war, which disrupts not only society but the ecological sphere. The more destructive the weapons used, the worse the environmental impact—the extreme being

Title: Freeing Mother Earth

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.4 LB9909p04

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Keywords: Commentary Earth Encouragement Environment Fred Freeing Guidance Mother Publisher Zaitso

nuclear weapons capable of creating a nuclear winter that can end life as we know it on the planet. Delusion or foolishness is the function of the mind that prevents us from seeing important connections or the true nature of things—specifically, the oneness or inseparability of ourselves and our environment, our connection to others, and the interdependence of all things.

Certainly, environmental movements around the world are protesting pollution and unrestrained consumption, and advocating regulation and wise use of resources. While these activities are important, they are insufficient on their own for changing the problems that threaten this Earth. Without addressing the fundamental inner cause that exists in the condition of the human heart and mind, no lasting changes will be forthcoming. What is needed is for many people on a broad scale to elevate and refresh their perspective on life and the environment.

To this end, President Ikeda has proposed that the SGI sponsor and support the establishment of an Earth Charter to be developed on a grass-roots level and submitted to the United Nations General Assembly for adoption. This issue of *Living Buddhism* features an up-to-date draft of the Earth Charter and related articles, including SGI President Ikeda's foreword to a pamphlet published by the Boston Research Center titled *Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter*. In re-reading the charter, I strongly sense that it is more than just a proposal to stop pollution and abuse of the environment—it represents a new and fresh perspective on human life and the environment that arises from the growing awareness of ordinary people worldwide.

At a symposium on the Earth Charter held at the SGI-USA's Florida Nature and Culture Center last October, Dr. Maximo Kalaw, executive director of the Earth Council Institute, stated:

What separates the Earth Charter from so many other legal documents that pass through the United Nations is its popular support. . . . It is the people's document. Through the voice of the people, it will have power in the United Nations. Further, its principles must be included in corporate policies, community welfare, church movements and taught to youth. . . . The process has to be an act of love—as your chorus sang, “heart to heart”—or it will not succeed.

The key to protecting the environment, as well as to securing peace and establishing a humanistic society, lies in cherishing the human heart. And the principle of oneness of life and the environment assures us that protecting people—nurturing them by inspiring wisdom and self-control—equals protecting the environment. Enabling the human revolution of just a single person will have a profound effect on the future of humanity. This is the purpose of Buddhist dialogue and propagation.

At the same time, protecting the environment amounts to protecting people. In studying his peace proposals and other writings, it is clear that no one is more determined to accomplish these goals than President Ikeda. We can be certain that to grasp and share this determination ourselves will be a great source of victory and joy.

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