

**RECOLLECTIONS OF MY MEETINGS WITH LEADING WORLD FIGURES
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DR. AURELIO PECCEI, CO-FOUNDER OF THE CLUB OF ROME**

There is a famous riddle. Water lilies are growing in a pond. Large lily pads are floating on the surface and they double in number each day. The first day there is one lily pad, the second day there are two, the third day there are four, the fourth day there are eight, and so forth.

If the entire surface of the pond were to be covered by lily pads on the thirtieth day, on what day would it be half-covered?

The answer, of course, is the day before — the twenty-ninth.

One day before the pond is completely covered, half of its surface will be free. Everything seems to be all right — there's still plenty of room. But by the very next day, in just a brief interval of time, it's all over — there's no more room left.

Anyone might notice that the end is near if they saw the pond on the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth day.

However, there is one individual who noticed the danger much earlier and who cried out: "If we don't do something right away it will be too late!" That man was Dr. Aurelio Peccei (1908–84), first president and cofounder of the world-renowned global think tank, the Club of Rome.

He warned of the devastating consequences of exploding population growth, environmental degradation, the waste of natural resources, and the tragic gap in wealth between the developed and developing nations. All these factors were intertwined, he said, and if left unaddressed would trigger a chain reaction leading to the day of destruction.

WE'RE OUT OF TIME

Dr. Peccei said to me that world leaders today are irresponsible. If we allow things to continue as they are, the world will become a barren place in the twenty-first century, and both nature and humanity will be destroyed. Though this truth is right before our eyes, he asserted, political leaders, business leaders, scientists, scholars, and bureaucrats do nothing; they think only of their immediate self-interest. They place a higher priority on preserving their own lifestyle than thinking about what kind of world they will leave to their children and grandchildren.

That is why, he stated, humanity itself must undergo a revolution. And a speedy one at that — there is no time left.

AN OUTDOOR SALON

I first met Dr. Peccei under the blue skies of Paris. White apple blossoms shimmered in the spring breeze. Dr. Peccei came all the way from Italy to meet me at our SGI center in Paris. At first we sat together in a reception room, but I asked to be permitted to make an "urgent motion." Apologizing that the room was small and cramped, I said: "The garden is very pretty. Why don't we go outside?" Dr. Peccei thought that was a splendid idea, and he smiled warmly. He seemed to share my dislike for empty formality.

He stood up and his energetic movements immediately struck me as those of a man of action. Dr. Peccei was a survivor of decades in the harshly competitive business world. When we met, on May 16, 1975, he was sixty-six.

Though it was his wife Marisa's birthday, he arranged his schedule to fit mine and came to visit me on that important day. I sensed a warm and sincere spirit filling his sturdy frame.

The rays of the sun were strong, so we set up an orange parasol on the green lawn and carried some armchairs outdoors. In a flash our impromptu salon was complete.

WE NEED A "HUMAN" REVOLUTION MORE THAN AN "IT" REVOLUTION

As Dr. Peccei spoke, he sometimes leaned forward in his chair with great intensity. The human race, he said, has experienced three revolutions so far: the industrial revolution, the scientific revolution, and the technological revolution. All of these were external revolutions. The problem was that the wisdom needed to decide how to use the fruits of those revolutions was as yet undeveloped.

The human race, which possesses an astonishing amount of knowledge, is astonishingly ignorant of how it should behave, he continued. Though our technology is developing quickly, culturally our development has stopped and petrified. To bridge that gap, he insisted, we need a renaissance of the human spirit, a revolution of human beings themselves.

This was in 1975. I am sure that today Dr. Peccei would also say that the human revolution is more important than the IT (information technology) revolution we are now experiencing.

LIMITS TO GROWTH

In 1972, three years before Dr. Peccei and I had our meeting in Paris, the Club of Rome had published its first report, "The Limits to Growth," which stirred up great controversy. It warned that if population and industrial growth continued to increase at the present rate, natural resources would be depleted, the environment would be polluted, and there would be widespread food shortages in less than one hundred years.

A year later, in 1973, the oil shock occurred. "No oil!" Stoppages in oil supplies made the entire world tremble. The Club of Rome report's warning took on a very real dimension in far less than a hundred years. Everyone was concerned that the wealth of the present was indeed short-lived.

But Dr. Peccei's main point was not that we must develop alternative resources because the old ones are running out; he was trying to elevate the discussion to an entirely different level. He asserted that the frantic pursuit of ever-greater wealth, ever-greater development, ever-greater economic growth as humanity's sole objective was itself profoundly mistaken. As long as we proceeded on that path, then regardless of the energy resource, it would be rapidly depleted and pollute the environment.

As he pointed out, the present generation will consume more natural resources during their lifetime than all generations preceding them. And all to what end? Dr. Peccei believed that humanity had been spiritually corrupted by the myth of economic growth.

This myth insists that we must always produce and consume more this year than last. Otherwise, we will lose the economic race and businesses will collapse. Political leaders will fail to get reelected. There is no choice—we must stay on the treadmill. If the planet goes to ruin or the exploited "have-not" nations starve, it can't be helped. That is the prevailing mentality.

The word development has become the mantra of our age, and behind the false hopes

it offers lies the reality of future catastrophe, from which we continue to avert our eyes.

AN AGE OF INSANITY?

In the developing world, where there is a lack of even enough clean water just to survive, more than thirty thousand infants die each day. That's one child every two seconds. In contrast, the developed nations, despite basic material needs being more than sufficiently met, must still keep on producing and selling new goods in order to maintain economic growth—in the process, wasting an enormous amount of natural resources.

Isn't this mad?

The cost of three of the latest fighter planes would pay to vaccinate all the children of the world and protect them from disease. And yet fighter planes take priority. Do we have the money to kill people but not to keep them alive?

Isn't this crazy?

When future generations look back at our time, surely they will call it an age of insanity. In spite of this, we pride ourselves on having the most highly developed societies in human history.

Isn't this bizarre?

THE STARTING POINT OF A LIFE OF STRUGGLE

It was the great British historian Arnold Toynbee who in fact recommended that I talk with Dr. Peccei. Likewise, Dr. Peccei knew of my dialogue with Dr. Toynbee. He brought a copy of my novel *The Human Revolution* with him to our meeting, and he made it a point to mention that he knew the Soka Gakkai had fought against fascism. He was well aware of the death of our first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in prison and the struggles of our second president, Josei Toda, there.

"You, too, Dr. Peccei," I said, "are a warrior who has endured the trials of prison."

From his bearing, I could sense the iron conviction that resided in his breast.

I wanted to ask him about the source of his spiritual strength, what lay deep in his heart that made him stand up and fight when no one else would.

When Dr. Peccei joined the antifascist resistance in Italy, he was already a successful businessman with international experience in France, China, and Russia. He returned home from abroad and joined the underground movement.

He was arrested in February 1944. Mussolini's power was already crumbling and Italy's ally, Nazi Germany, was in virtual control of the country. Dr. Peccei was thirty-five. In his dark prison cell, Dr. Peccei recalls, he came to know who he was for the first time in his life. Assaulted by ceaseless anxiety, he focused on the future. He thought solely about one thing: Under no circumstances must such a tragedy be repeated.

ENDURING TORTURE

When Dr. Peccei was arrested, he was in possession of top-secret codes and documents detailing the Italian Resistance's military plans. This placed him in a very bad predicament. His captors decided that if they could make him talk, they would know everything the opposition was planning, and so they tortured him mercilessly. They employed horrible violence, Dr. Peccei said, their hatred and fanaticism only making them more cruel.

The torture continued, but Dr. Peccei would not talk. One morning, a woman from the village came to the prison looking for her son who had disappeared. She saw someone

being led through the prison courtyard and gasped in recognition. “Could that be Signor Peccei?” She could not tell from his face, it was beaten so badly, but she thought she knew his overcoat. “I have to tell his comrades right away,” she thought.

When they learned of his whereabouts and how he was being treated, they presented the fascists with a demand: Unless the torture of Dr. Peccei stopped, they would pass a death sentence on the fascist militia commanders. The fascists stopped their torture on the condition that their commanders remained unharmed, otherwise they would immediately shoot Dr. Peccei. The dangerous balancing act went on.

A friend who had spoken up for Dr. Peccei in jail was also tortured repeatedly in the hope that he might say something that could be used against Dr. Peccei, but he protected his friend to the end.

Dr. Peccei recalled that in jail all one can fall back on are one’s beliefs and one’s humanity. He said he learned that people who are used to giving orders crack easily. It’s the quiet, hardworking types who turn out to be strong in extreme circumstances. He said he hated traitors most of all.

He remained in prison for eleven months. Gradually, the tide of war turned against fascism. Though the danger of vengeance loomed over Dr. Peccei’s head, he was saved by a hair’s breadth. One fascist faction, fearing retaliation after their side’s defeat, released Dr. Peccei on a freezing morning in January 1945.

LEARNING FROM ADVERSITY

Dr. Peccei conceded that he suffered terribly, but also acknowledges that the ordeal he underwent strengthened his convictions. He also found friends whom he knew he could trust absolutely. Ironically, he learned a lot from his fascist captors, he said. He smiled, shrugged, and added that, for that reason, he was now prepared to forgive them.

I was deeply moved by the human triumph of Dr. Peccei, who counted himself fortunate to have undergone those eleven months of captivity.

In prison he experienced the foulest depths of human evil and, at the same time, the loftiest heights of human nobility. He realized that there was a tremendous force within us seeking good. It may be asleep, but it is there. That was his great awakening.

A NEW DEPARTURE AT AGE SIXTY

After the war, Dr. Peccei devoted his efforts to the economic revival of his homeland and was a great success as a businessman. But as he traveled around the world, crossing the equator more than three hundred times, a dark cloud of doubt began to grow in his heart. Was he really right to be working so hard for growth and development for their own sake? If all his efforts were only leading toward the destruction of the world, weren’t they essentially meaningless?

The population of the planet was growing by a hundred million a year. By the mid-twenty-first century it would reach ten billion. Agricultural production could never keep up with that. If deforestation continued at its present pace, all the forests on earth would disappear in the next hundred years. Global warming was also progressing at an alarming rate.

The Nazis had been guilty of genocide, but now all of humanity was guilty of the crime of ecocide, the destruction of the natural environment. Dr. Peccei had vowed in prison to never let such barbaric events occur again. In 1968, he invited leading intellectuals to a

conference in Rome. The world was full of specialists, he thought, but what was needed was a sense of responsibility based on a grasp of the whole picture—the future of humanity. What was needed were people who felt that responsibility and were prepared to act on it.

Thus began the interdisciplinary think tank that is the Club of Rome. Thus also began the “golden years” of Dr. Peccei’s life, a new departure at the age of sixty.

MEMORIES OF FRIENDSHIP

Our discussions, which began at that outdoor salon in Paris, continued for about ten years, until Dr. Peccei’s death. I met him in person five times.

At our second meeting, in Tokyo, he visited me at the offices of the *Seikyo Shimbun* in spite of his tight schedule, arriving in Japan one day and departing the next.

When we met in Florence, he drove four hours from Rome in his own little car. I was deeply humbled when I learned he had only just returned home from London the day before! Dr. Peccei also gave his heart and soul to our published dialogue, *Before It Is Too Late*, which we discussed at that meeting.

I next met him at our International Friendship Center in Shibuya, Tokyo, where we walked around the small garden side by side. We were so engrossed in our conversation that we had to be careful not to fall into the pond! Dr. Peccei murmured, as if to himself, that while the garden was beautiful, nothing in the world was more beautiful than friendship. He seemed to be saying it more to confirm his own feelings than to me.

Our last meeting was once again in Paris, in June 1983, a mere nine months before he passed away. On that day he had just flown into Paris after attending a conference in the United States and came directly from the airport to see me at my hotel. Unfortunately, all his luggage had been stolen. He realized this, of course, but he delayed filing a claim and came directly to me, not wanting to be late for our meeting. Appearing at my hotel without a necktie, in the clothes he had worn on the plane, he seemed to glow with an almost divine energy.

During that meeting he said he was determined that our friendship would grow stronger, no matter what kinds of criticisms or attacks the mass media might launch at us. These were his last words to me.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Dr. Peccei abhorred the shortsightedness of journalists; that perspective was poles apart from his own. The Club of Rome cofounder always emphasized that unless one adopted the long-term view, all arguments and efforts were essentially useless. When it is clear that a ship is on a collision course, shouldn’t you immediately change course? What can you learn by just staring at the waves crashing against the helm?

Much of the mass media heaped ridicule and sarcasm on the activities of the Club of Rome, and they lampooned Dr. Peccei as a prophet of doom. There were also scholars who derided the Club and countered its warnings with all kinds of irresponsible arguments. For instance, a certain Japanese scholar likened the Club of Rome’s concerns about runaway population and industrial growth to people in the eighteenth century fearing that the increase in carriages would bury the world in horse manure. He said they hadn’t taken advances in technology into account.

Communists called the Club of Rome “capitalist,” and capitalists denounced it as

“communist.” Developing countries said the Club’s ideas were a plot to stop their development, leveling the accusation that the rich are unable to understand the feelings of the poor.

But gradually support for the Club of Rome’s position grew, and today the fact that the earth has a limited capacity to support human life is recognized by all. Humankind is waking from its single-minded obsession with material affluence at all costs. In 1992, the United Nations held an Earth Summit, and since then many international organizations, national governments, and private groups have begun to try to deal with the many global issues confronting us today.

Dr. Peccei’s lonely first step became a giant step for humanity.

A LIFE OF CONTINUOUS WORK AND INVOLVEMENT

On March 14, 1984, this great pioneer passed away at the age of seventy-five. It was a life of continuous work and involvement. Twelve hours before his death, he was dictating from his bed. He was a determined man. His last unfinished manuscript was titled Agenda for the End of the Century, and it was published posthumously. Dr. Peccei didn’t live to see it in print.

One passage of it reads:

Progress, as it is now understood, certainly cannot be stopped. Therefore, humankind’s only recourse is to enhance the quality and qualities of its members all over the world so that, by learning how to ride the technological tigers they have unleashed, humans and not machines will be tomorrow’s protagonists.¹

Dr. Peccei at first called this enhancement of the quality and qualities of humanity a “humanistic revolution,” but he later changed it to “human revolution.” In a manuscript written a month before his death, he wrote, “What we need is a new philosophy of life.”²

INHERITING THE SPIRIT OF A GREAT INDIVIDUAL

After Dr. Peccei’s death, I met his sons Roberto Peccei (a physicist) and Riccardo Peccei (a sociologist). I met Riccardo in England. As we spoke of our memories of his father, I said: “When a great individual dies, we tend to forget his ideals and his spirit and allow our own egos to assert themselves. This is a mark of human weakness and ugliness. I believe that the most important thing is for us to carry on Dr. Peccei’s ideal and goals without wavering.”

Today, carrying on the ideals of Dr. Peccei, the Club of Rome continues its influential activities under the leadership of President Ricardo Diez-Hochleitner.

Riccardo Peccei told me that his father, in his later years, often used to say that it was up to youth to change the world, and they would do it through their human revolutions. When he was alive, Dr. Peccei praised the Soka Gakkai’s youth division, saying it was leading the way in this effort and spreading friendship around the world.

Dr. Peccei was a man of immense character, like a loving father. While looking far into the future, like a true philosopher, he also possessed the keen practical judgment and decisiveness of a businessman. His greatness was that both of these characteristics arose from his love of humanity.

When I recall Dr. Peccei, I remember those blue skies over Paris, and the voice of that dauntless warrior who fought so ardently to create a future as bright and clear as those skies.

I can still hear him saying that, while there is a limit to economic growth, there is no limit to human learning. Our external resources are limited, he said, but our inner wealth unlimited. It is untapped, and human revolution is what allows us to bring it forth. We must make use of every available means to advance that human revolution, he said.

“We are agreed. Let’s do it!” he declared, and extended his hand, so that we could shake on it. “Let us do it,” he said, “for the sake of the twenty-first century, for the sake of our children and grandchildren, before it is too late!”

1. The Club of Rome: Agenda for the End of the Century (March 1992), a pamphlet to commemorate the holding of the Club of Rome’s Fukuoka Conference, pp. 38–40.
2. Daisaku Ikeda and Aurelio Peccei, “Appendix,” *Nijuisseiki e no Keisho* (Sounding a Warning for the Twenty-first Century) (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1984), p. 334.

THE CLUB OF ROME

The Club of Rome is a global think tank cofounded by Dr. Aurelio Peccei in 1968. As a non-profit, non governmental organization (NGO), it brings together scientists, economists, businessmen, international high civil servants, heads of state and former heads of state. They are people who are convinced that the future of humankind is not fixed and that each human being can contribute to the improvement of the world’s societies.

The Club of Rome seeks solutions to what it calls the “world problematique,” the complex problems facing humanity in the political, social, economic, technological, environmental, psychological and cultural arenas. It takes the perspective of a growing interdependence of nations and that global problems are beyond the capacity of individual countries.

For more about The Club of Rome, visit their website at: www.ClubOfRome.org