REVIVING EDUCATION: THE BRILLIANCE OF THE INNER SPIRIT– FURTHER THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BY SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA

Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), is the founder of the Soka school system. The Soka school system comprises all levels from pre-school to post-graduate and offers an education based on the principle of value creation. Soka University opened in Hachioji, Japan in 1971 and Soka University of America was established in Calabasas, California, in 1987. Soka University at Aliso Viejo was dedicated last May and will open in the fall to students. In recent years, Soka Kindergarten schools have been opened in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia.

In September 2000, President Ikeda presented a proposal entitled "Building a Society Serving the Essential Needs of Education—Some Views on Education in the Twenty-first Century" (February issue). The current proposal builds on the earlier suggestions to uproot the problems of bullying and other violent behavior in the schools. Under consideration here are further measures to rehabilitate the educational function of schools and society.

Highlighting the widespread apathy and cynicism that underlie the current educational crisis, the author argues for the necessity of a social ethos that will not tolerate any form of violence. Examining the differences between ego and self, he goes on to discuss the dangers inherent in a mentality devoid of an awareness of "other." There is, therefore, a vital need for education to foster a universal sense of empathy with others.

The author warns that the solution to the current educational crisis lies not in a reversion to the past but, rather, in the forward movement of an education framed by living values that draw forth children's natural potential. Firmly opposed to reviving the religious education policies of World War II-era Japan, he propounds humanistic education to inspire an inner-motivated spirituality and enable human beings to lead more meaningful and fulfilling lives. As one concrete example, he proposes increasing opportunities for broader exposure to great works of literature, thus making character building through reading a cornerstone of education.

While some counseling services are provided by schools and the government, establishing additional venues where people directly and peripherally engaged in the education process can seek advice is an essential need. The author suggests that community-based efforts, such as the Educational Counseling Program initiated by the educators division of the Soka Gakkai, can help alleviate feelings of isolation suffered by troubled children or their parents.

The Twenty-first Century Is Upon Us at Last.

Out of a desire to see this new century become a century of education, I presented a paper on education in the autumn of 2000. My aim was twofold: to sound the alarm in Japan over the continuing treatment of education as simply a means to an end, and to call for a shift from viewing education as serving the narrowly defined needs of society to a new paradigm which sees society serving the lifelong process of education.

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I believe it is vital that education be reoriented to its prime objective, namely, the lifelong happiness of learners. In this paper, I wish to delve further into the problems of education against which schools and society must be vigilant if we are to find a solution to the bullying and other acts of violence that most immediately and directly affect children.

Incidents of bullying and other forms of physical and psychological violence have been on the rise for some time in Japan, despite the ideal of schools being havens of the joys of learning and living. The Ministry of Education's 1999 survey of public schools from elementary through high-school levels reported a record 36,000 incidents of violent behavior, the highest to date. Although the numbers appear to be on a slightly downward trend, there were well over thirty thousand cases of physical and psychological bullying reported.

This suggests a deplorable situation. Since the numbers do not hint at how many incidents go unreported, let alone how many occur in private schools, some observers claim reported incidents represent merely the tip of the iceberg.

Scrutiny of the numbers aside, the point here is that aberrant conditions have become the norm. Children are the microcosm of the times, and as such, they mirror the future of society. As long as these mirrors remain dark and clouded, we will not see in them a hope-filled future.

While some remedial measures have been instituted by the Ministry of Education and independent commissions, I feel that along with structural deterrents to bullying there is an urgent need to establish not only in schools but throughout society an ethos of zero tolerance toward violence.

An Earnest Wish to End Violence

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the Japanese educator and first president of the Soka Gakkai, lamented the plight of the children of his day whose education and very lives bore the imprint of the march toward imperial expansion. This was a man who cherished a deep desire to resolve the underlying problems that were causing intense suffering to an entire generation of ten million children and students exposed to the pressures of a society in turmoil. He was determined that the burden of these problems not be passed on to the next generation (vol. 5, p. 8). From this vow was born his key work on education, *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy), published more than seventy years ago in 1930. Central to his formulation of Soka, or value-creating, education is the tenet that all children should be afforded the opportunity to limitlessly develop their potential and lead fulfilling lives undeterred by the destructive influences in society. This tenet continues to be the driving force of the Soka schools today.

We must end the tragedy of school violence whereby the rich seeds of future promise and potential are destroyed by the children themselves. Every time I visit the Soka schools in Tokyo and Kansai, I speak frankly with the students, stating that bullying and violence are in all cases wrong and encouraging the students that we should all work together to eliminate these evils from society.

Of course, my appeal to the students is not particularly novel. For the vast majority of the adult population, there is a commonsense assumption that the rejection of violence is a cornerstone of civilized society. Unfortunately, of late it seems we can no longer assume this to be the norm of social behavior. While documented incidents of school violence and other acts of juvenile crime and misconduct may not have dramatically increased in recent years, the problem is not defined simply by the frequency of its occurrence. Rather, we must examine closely the specific nature of the problem. Unless we squarely face this reality, any appeal to end bullying will fall short of reaching children's hearts and, instead, have the hollow ring of a

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superficial slogan.

Above all, we need courage if we are to end violence in schools — the kind of courage that will allow us neither to yield when confronted by evil nor to remain idle witnesses in the face of evil. When we muster up this kind of courage, bullying as well as all other forms of violence will inevitably be rejected. The question is whether we can indeed summon this courage. On the subject of bullying, last year the *Seikyo Shimbun* published a series of discussions between myself and several young people regularly in contact with junior high school students. From these talks I became acutely aware of how difficult it is — for parents and teachers as well as for students — to be truly courageous individuals.

Aversion to Good, Aversion to Evil

The philosopher and religious writer Simone Weil (1909–43) astutely observed that for writers of her day "words which contain a reference to good and evil" had become "degraded, especially those which refer to the good" (288). We see this increasingly in our own time, when words related to good — not only courage but also effort, patience, love, and hope — are met with cynicism and indifference. Ours is a social climate in which people are perhaps fearful of being judged by others and hesitate even to utter such words. Unless we boldly confront cynicism and indifference, we will be unable to make fundamental and effective responses.

This undercurrent of social and spiritual malaise has spread rapidly in recent years. The question, "Why is it wrong to kill people?" was asked recently on a popular Japanese television program. It then became the title of a feature series in a magazine and was later published as a book (Nagai). These phenomena give us an indication of where the problem lies: when even the time-honored tenets and virtues articulated in all the major world religions, such as prohibitions against the taking of human life, are called into question, one can easily imagine the prevailing attitude toward coercive and violent behavior such as bullying. I believe we must wake up to the fact that cynicism and indifference erode society at its roots and are potentially more dangerous than any individual act of evil.

Two men with whom I co-published a series of dialogues, the re-nowned Russian children's author Albert A. Likhanov and Norman Cousins, known as the conscience of America, both shared this view. They adamantly warned against the dangers of indifference and cynicism in the face of evil — even more than evil itself — because these attitudes reveal a decisive lack of passionate engagement with life, an isolation and withdrawal from reality.

Citing the paradoxical words of Bruno Jasienski, Likhanov warns of the profound harm apathy inflicts on a young person's soul:

"Do not fear your enemies. The worst they can do is kill you. Do not fear friends. At worst, they may betray you. Fear those who do not care; they neither kill nor betray, but betrayal and murder exist because of their silent consent" (*Wakamonotachi*, p. 161).

In other words, it is the act of averting our eyes from acts of murder or betrayal that allows such evil to proliferate without end. Similarly, Cousins makes reference to the following statement by Robert Louis Stevenson:

"I hate cynicism a great deal more than I do the devil, unless perhaps the two are the same thing" (pp. 48–49).

He voices his own deep concern that the defeatism and self-doubt characteristic of a pessimistic attitude will undermine and destroy such values as idealism, hope and trust.

A state of life controlled by apathy and cynicism grows immune to emotions of love or hatred, suffering or joy, and retreats into a barren, makeshift world of alienation. Indifference toward evil implies an indifference toward good. It makes for a bleak state of life and a semantic

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space estranged from the vital drama of the struggle between good and evil.

Children's keen senses quickly detect the apathy and cynicism rampant in an adult world bereft of values. It is perhaps for this reason that adults become uneasy when they see in children's hearts an eerie and familiar darkness.

Evil, like good, is an undeniable reality. Without evil there is no good, and without good there is no evil: they coexist and are defined by their complementarity. Depending on one's response or reaction, evil can be transformed to good or good to evil. In this sense, they are both relative and transmutable. We must therefore recognize that both good and evil are defined in relation to their opposite or "other," and that the "self" is defined by this dynamic.

"Self" in the Absence of "Other"

In Buddhism we find the concepts of "the oneness of good and evil" and "the fundamental neutrality of life with regard to good and evil" (Nichiren, *Writings*). As an example, for the historical Buddha Shakyamuni (representing good) to attain enlightenment and thereby fulfill his purpose in life there had to exist an opposing, evil "other," in this case his cousin Devadatta who sought to undermine and then destroy him. In contrast, the failure to acknowledge and reconcile oneself with the existence of an opposing "other" is the basic flaw in an apathetic, cynical approach to life, in which only the isolated self exists.

A truer, fuller sense of self is found in the totality of the psyche that is inextricably linked to "other." Carl Jung (1875–1961) distinguished between "Ego," which knows only the outer content of the psyche, and "Self," which knows its inner content as well and unifies the conscious and the unconscious. In the world of apathy and cynicism we find only an isolated sense of self roaming the surface of the conscious mind — what Jung refers to as ego.

The "self" lacking identification with the "other" is insensitive to the pain, anguish and suffering of the "other." It tends to confine itself to its own world, either sensing threat in the slightest provocation and triggering violent behavior, or nonresponsively turning away in detachment.

I would venture to say this mentality provided the nesting ground of the fanatical ideologies, such as fascism and bolshevism, which swept through the twentieth century. We have more recently witnessed the birth of virtual reality which can also, I believe, further obscure the "other." Viewed in this light, it is clear that none of us can remain a mere spectator or view the problematic behavior of children as someone else's responsibility.

In the course of our discussion, peace scholar Johan Galtung mentioned that the prerequisite for an "outer dialogue" is an "inner dialogue" (p. 64). If the concept of "other" is absent from "self," true dialogue cannot take place.

Exchanges between two individuals both lacking a sense of "other" might appear to be dialogue, but are in fact simply the trading of one-sided statements. Communication inevitably fails. Most distressing in this semantic space — at once voluble and empty — is that words lose their resonance and are eventually stifled and expire. The demise of words naturally means the demise of an essential aspect of our humanity — the capacity for language that earned us the name *Homo loquens*.

Reality can be revealed only through genuine dialogue, where "self" and "other" transcend the narrow limits of ego and fully interact. This inclusive sense of reality expresses a human spirituality abounding in vitality and empathy.

In a lecture I gave at Harvard University in 1991, I stated that the times require an ethos of "soft power." I suggested that an inner-motivated spirituality constitutes the essence of soft power and that this derives from inner-directed processes. It becomes manifest when the soul

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has struggled through phases of suffering, conflict, ambivalence, mature deliberation, and, finally, resolution.

It is only in the burning furnace of intense, soul-baring exchanges — the ceaseless and mutually supporting processes of inner and outer dialogue between one's "self" and a profoundly internalized "other" — that our being is tempered and refined. Only then can we begin to grasp and fully affirm the reality of being alive. Only then can we bring forth the brilliance of a universal spirituality that embraces all humankind.

The Inner Realm of the Soul and Religious Sentiment

I believe that the spiritual heritage of humanity can be found in its great works of literature, which may be considered the quintessential representation of the inner self. Here, I would like to draw on *The House of the Dead*, a work said to have marked a turning point in Dostoyevsky's career as a writer.

The young Dostoyevsky was sentenced — for allegedly harboring revolutionary ideas — to four years of hard labor in the bitter cold of Siberia. *The House of the Dead* is unparalleled in documenting the common virtues of humankind revealed to him through this terrible ordeal.

"[T]he common people . . . never reproach a criminal with the crime that he has committed, whatever it may be. They forgive him in consideration of the sentence passed upon him.

"It is well known that the common people throughout Russia call crime a "misfortune," and the criminal an "unfortunate." This definition is expressive and profound, though unconscious and instinctive" (pp. 55–56).

The "unfortunate" — an unusual choice of words, yet one rich in significance. Perhaps it shows Dostoyevsky's somewhat romantic view of the Russian people. I trust the insight of a great writer who goes beyond the superficial to speak of the inner realm of the soul.

To call a crime a "misfortune" and a criminal an "unfortunate" reflects a breadth of perception inclusive of "other." No distinction is made between oneself and the criminal; the expression exudes a sense of empathetic connection.

When empathy remains high in the midst of adversity, a healthy flow of communication prevails. On the other hand, the loss of a sense of connection between people signals the breakdown of communication in a society. Unable to communicate, to recognize the worth of a single person's life, people find themselves endlessly debating — and incapable of answering — the straightforward question: "Why is it wrong to kill?"

Thoughtless arrogance, the root of all ideological evil, presupposes oneself is good and the "other" is evil. By contrast, the kind of attitude described by Dostoyevsky enables one to see that a person compelled by circumstances toward evil can also be inspired toward good. From this view emanates the expansive "inner impulse of compassion" (p. 7) that Rousseau deemed the primordial foundation of society.

This natural compassion resonates closely with what Mahayana Buddhism terms *the Bodhisattva Way*, the epitome of which may be found in the words of Bodhisattva Vimalakirti — "Because all living beings are sick, therefore I am sick" (p. 65) — and in the example of Jesus of Nazareth who focused more love and compassion on the one "stray sheep" than all the rest.

The running theme in Dostoyevsky's later works is theodicy, a defense of God's justice in creating a world in which both good and evil exist. Central to Rousseau's thoughts on education is a religious sentiment independent of, and unbounded by, church dogma and authority. It would seem that at the heart of universal feelings of empathy and spirituality

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thrives some form of religious sentiment and that this is inherent in human beings.

In the twentieth century, a century of war and violence, we find also the bright light of spirituality emanating from the nonviolent struggles of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. One might ask how their struggles became mass movements and why many people today embrace nonviolence. Like Gandhi, who asserted that religion "provides a moral basis to all other activities which they otherwise lack" (p. 63), I believe the answer is in what lay beneath the words and actions of these leaders. They each based themselves on a strong religious conviction, which enabled them to remain unswayed by any adversity.

An Absence of Values

American psychologist Abraham H. Maslow offered an important insight into education from the perspective of spirituality. According to Maslow, the primary consideration of education is to "help [the student] to become the best he is capable of becoming, to become actually what he deeply is potentially" (p. 49). His view closely parallels Makiguchi's view that consistently placed the happiness of learners at the center of education.

Maslow insisted that we must never take our eyes off the "far goals" and "ultimate values" of education, lest we lose sight of the "highest potential" attainable by human beings and end up confusing our priorities (pp. 50–52). Arguably Japan, with its current educational crisis, should find his warning disquieting. After all, it is a crisis brought on by decades of educational policies shaped by the perceived immediate needs of either the military or the economy.

To my view, the long-term values Maslow approached from philosophical, religious, humanistic and ethical angles equate with the cultivation of spirituality and broad religious sentiment.

In November 2000, I had the opportunity to meet with Victor Kazanjian, dean of Religious and Spiritual Life at Wellesley College in the United States, and one of the cofounders of the Education as Transformation Project. With some 350 participating colleges and universities across the United States, the project seeks to redress the current state of education in which ties between individuals and between individuals and society have eroded. It aims for the embrace of wholeness and spirituality in education.

Dean Kazanjian has noted the increasing dissociation between intellectual training and spiritual values, along with the growing trend that views education simply as a means or instrumentality. Consequently, he has expressed high hopes for Soka University of America's humanistic approach to education, which aims to nurture the whole individual. In fact, this aim is the heart and guiding ethic of Soka education that has been painstakingly developed since Makiguchi's time.

The turmoil in education and the consequent darkness enveloping the lives of children point to an eroded ability to educate on the part of society as a whole and its constituent elements — not only those institutions with formal responsibility for educational and religious matters but including the family and the community.

We cannot continue merely treating the symptoms of this malaise. I am not alone in believing we have reached the point at which we must opt for a comprehensive strategy. Maslow aptly raised the question of whether a "value-free education" is at all desirable. Perhaps it is time to choose a response that resonates with the spirituality and faith in the depths of the human heart.

Against Compulsory Religious Education in Japan

Here I wish to be very clear about this point. In no way am I proposing a return to formal, state-sanctioned religious education in Japan. To do so would be to ignore the painful lessons of pre-World War II Japan's enshrinement of State Shinto as the official religion of the nation.

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This had, of course, an overwhelming impact on schools at the time, turning them into a delivery system for force-feeding the population with militarism and nationalism. Both the postwar Japanese Constitution and the Fundamental Law of Education expressly prohibit religious education in public schools, and for good reason.

Lately we hear from certain quarters in Japanese society the resurgent strains of ultranationalism. These voices call for the reinstatement of religious education in public schools as a means to restore social discipline. I am adamantly opposed to repeating the tragic manipulation of young minds that took place in prewar Japan. I am absolutely against compulsory religious education that would trample on the freedoms of thought and religion.

The Soka Gakkai's commitment to human rights can be traced to the spiritual struggles waged by its first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and its second president, Josei Toda. Both men gave their all to combat the totalitarianism that robbed citizens of their spiritual freedom and mobilized the Japanese nation into war.

As heir to their spiritual legacy, I believe standing up for religious freedom to be an important role of the Soka Gakkai in society. This has also been my personal commitment. Twenty-seven years ago, in 1974, addressing the organization's annual headquarters general meeting, I gave voice to this credo:

"Obviously, we must do all we can to ensure our own freedom of religion and faith. But in addition, should it ever become apparent that the authorities are trying to use violence to rob others of their spiritual freedom, even if the philosophies and faiths of those people differ from ours, we must offer them all the protection we can in the name of the dignity of man. Because this is the unaltering Buddhist view of humanity, I insist that we must afford our protection to those whose religions are different from our own and even to those who reject religion altogether" (*A Lasting Peace*, p. 80).

The freedom of religion, though guaranteed by the Japanese Constitution, cannot be taken for granted. For this reason, I have made it a point to speak out in protest against religious education in public schools. The proposition infringes basic rights and runs counter to the Fundamental Law of Education, Article IX, which reads: "The schools established by the state and local public bodies shall refrain from religious education or activities for a specified religion."

Of course, private schools can provide religious education as it accords with their educational philosophies, goals and religious values. This is not a cause for concern as long as the children's personal freedom of religion is not infringed.

On this point, the Soka schools form part of a private educational system ranging from kindergarten to the university level, and they focus on value-creating education. Religious doctrine is not taught, nor is it incorporated into any class. With the aim of developing students' abilities to ponder meaning and purpose, the schools' mission is to foster a rich humanism and spirituality that will enable students to enjoy personal growth and contribute to society.

The Cultivation of Religious Sentiment

How to inspire spirituality and religious sentiment is a challenge that has exercised humanity throughout history. I maintain that if we are to revive in education its ability to foster spirituality and broad religious sentiment, every individual, every family, every organization, and every sector of society must pool their energies and resources. Naturally the Soka Gakkai, which plays an active role in Japanese society, shares in this challenge. Likewise the Soka Gakkai International, an association of national organizations and members throughout the world, is at once a Buddhist-based movement and a movement for human transformation and

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engagement with society.

In other words, the role of religion is inseparable from the individual and society: Religion must enable individuals to achieve their personal goals as well as contribute positively to society. Were these intertwining paths to diverge, religious sentiment would be reduced to sectarianism; religion would degenerate into something antihumanistic and antisocial. Any religious movement that considers its role and mission as separate from society is, in my view, making a fundamental error. There is a sharp distinction between the broad religious sentiment I describe here and narrow sectarianism.

Any religious sentiment that does not enable individuals to create value or take constructive action in their personal lives and in society is deceptive and does not deserve to be called religious at all. I once described the mission of the Soka Gakkai as follows:

"Various powers in the world — authority, money, brutality — attempt to violate human dignity. The role of Soka Gakkai in society is to employ the spirit that wells from the very depths of life to do battle with such powers" (*A Lasting Peace*, p. 218).

When the Kobe area of Japan was struck by a devastating earthquake in 1995, the local Soka Gakkai members, spearheaded by the youth, contributed significantly and immediately by providing voluntary assistance to those affected. Local Soka Gakkai community centers served as emergency shelters, and hot cooked meals were provided. These actions were deeply appreciated. In September 2000, Soka Gakkai members participated in relief efforts to distribute welcome aid when torrential rains hit the eastern coastal regions of Japan. I believe that such actions, sharing in both the sorrows and joys of other people, are the natural expression of spirituality and religious sentiment.

Whether a religion can move beyond sectarianism and whether the spirituality and religious sentiment it inspires can garner universal understanding will be the test of that faith's ability to contribute to civilization in the twenty-first century. This is the reason I must state once more my grave concerns regarding the dangers of reintroducing sectarian religious education into public schools.

Building Character Through Reading

I believe that the means to encourage a flowering in the neglected inner life of children will always be exposure to literature and the arts. In short, I believe the key is to be found in reading books.

The first step in reviving dialogue where human bonds and communication have broken down is to revitalize and infuse the written and spoken word with the light of spirituality. Literary masterpieces are the ideal vehicle for this endeavor, which should not be limited to schools. From my own experience, I can say that the experience of immersing oneself in the world's greatest literature at a young age is an invaluable, lifelong asset.

In Japan, the school system affords children various opportunities to read literature. In many cases, however, these works are delivered in the form of Japanese-language textbooks designed mainly to improve reading skills. More reading programs are now being instituted in schools across Japan, but perhaps the aim should be higher: Serious consideration should also be given to making world literature a core subject in the school curriculum.

In the Swedish school system, the educational curriculum is designed to reflect no bias in favor of any specific religion. Student motivation and initiative to read are central to the educational program, in that students are given the freedom to select topics of interest from a broad range of texts. Encouraging the children in this way hones their powers of insight and reasoning, so they are equipped to grapple with the fundamental and ethical issues facing

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modern civilization. Surely as Japan reexamines educational methods and their implementation, it can benefit greatly from the examples of other countries.

In a sense, reading presents a summation of the author's life experiences. In *Nagai Saka* (The Long Slope), popular novelist Shugoro Yamamoto notes:

"Life is long. Whether one reaches the summit in one bound or steadily scales the mountain step by step, the destination is the same. Rather than accomplishing the journey in one bound, scaling the mountain step by step affords one the opportunity to enjoy the scenery along the way. The trees. The plants. The springs. Moreover, one can have confidence in knowing that each step has been taken carefully and securely. This becomes the source of greater strength" (p. 17).

His imaginative and profound words can be applied easily to the experience of reading. Reading the classics is challenging. Even when they are not lengthy, grasping their essence is not as easy as it is for, say, comic books. A complex passage may require rereading two or three times before it makes some kind of sense. Some passages may defy immediate comprehension, requiring instead the light of time.

Certainly, these arduous efforts are much like those of a mountain climber who carefully checks for secure footing and remains alert to his surroundings as he makes his way to the summit. Reading digests or synopses of great works does them no justice. Only when we have painstakingly struggled to grasp the full meaning of a book does it become part of our flesh and blood.

While reading alone at one's desk has its merits, the value of the reading experience is augmented when shared with friends or teachers. It is heightened by the exchange of ideas, especially when one considers reading a lifelong habit. My own teenage years, spent amidst the burnt rubble of the postwar period, were enriched immeasurably by a reading circle formed with the youth in my neighborhood. Also forever etched in my life are precious memories of reading sessions with my mentor, Josei Toda.

My mentor never tired of encouraging us to be active, never passive, readers; to strive to absorb but not be overwhelmed by books. A master of life, he taught me through his attitude and words this invaluable lesson: the way we relate to books is the way we relate to people, and encountering a good book is the same as encountering a good mentor or a good friend.

The Dangers of Virtual Reality

I have a second reason for insisting on the importance of reading. An accumulation of experience in reading can act as a buffer to shield one's inner life from the adverse influences of what is popularly termed virtual reality.

Clearly, the projection of images in virtual reality has some utilitarian value. But it is also true that it distorts as well as simulates real-life experiences in which people share an empathic resonance through direct contact with each other and with nature. On the purely harmful side, the overpowering stimulation and excitement virtual reality produces can lull the imagination and numb sympathetic feelings for real pain and suffering.

Once inured to the conditioning of virtual reality, people may turn into mere passive receptors of programmed images. Active faculties, components of an inner-motivated spirituality — the powers, for example, to think critically, to make decisions, to love and sympathize, to stand against evil, to believe — tend to atrophy.

Scientist and philosopher Albert Jacquard has made the following observation:

"Information science, inasmuch as it provides information, is valuable. However, it supplies only canned or frozen communication. It is incapable of evoking the bursts of creativity that come naturally in the course of a dialogue comprising moments of silence as well as words" (*Petite Philosophie*, p. 18).

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His way of describing dehumanized communication is very apt. Reading, on the other hand, generates a restorative breeze of inspiration in the depths of one's soul — a capacity well beyond that of such "frozen" communication. After all, the experience of reading comes down to a tenacious, intimate dialogue between author and reader. This is the reason I refer to the world of reading as a rich summation of life experiences.

Yet another reason to value reading is that it affords youth and adults alike the opportunity to rise above the routine experiences of everyday life and ponder their past and future prospects. Be it from a book previously read or one pored over for the first time, we feel something genuine, we are moved as every fiber of our being grapples with its content. Without such full engagement, it would be nearly impossible to share our impressions of books with children. The truth resonates with the listener not through empty words but through the richness and depth of one's own character.

Above all else, the experience of reading nurtures the spontaneity of children's curiosity. It encourages their self-discipline to take time for reflection and develops their capacity to seek solutions from within.

Tolstoy's Portrait of Spiritual Transformation

World literature is a treasure house of questions, of reflection and wonderment.

Let us draw from a scene in the final chapter of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, where the protagonist Levin asks himself: "What am I? And where am I? And why am I here?" (p. 792).

Levin, said to portray Tolstoy himself, is seeking the reason for his existence when he encounters a peasant whose words transform him. Tolstoy deftly and poignantly captures this transformation, the opening of new horizons and the subsequent opening and flowering of Levin's emotions.

"Well, that's how it is — people are different. One man just lives for his own needs, take Mityukha even, just stuffs his belly, but Fokanych — he's an upright old man. He lives for the soul. He remembers God" (p. 794).

To live for one's soul — these simple words, spoken nonchalantly by a peasant, pierce Levin's heart. Walking along the road, he continues his soliloquy as he savors this novel sensation.

"He felt something new in his soul and delightedly probed this new thing, not yet knowing what it was" (p. 795).

As he finally becomes satisfied that he has gleaned the answer, Levin turns into the woods to lie down on the grass and thinks to himself:

"I haven't discovered anything. I've only found out what I know. I've understood that power which not only gave me life in the past but is giving me life now. I am freed from deception, I have found the master" (p. 796).

Images of transformation from darkness to light appear frequently in Tolstoy's works: typically from questioning to effusive inspiration from the contact of two souls; then through self-examination to the discovery and formation of a new self. These processes truly capture the workings of the spirit.

By virtue of his vital spirituality regained, Levin sees through the deception of war to its harsh and simple reality — human beings killing each other. The dawning truth seeps into his interjection: "'But it's not just to sacrifice themselves, it's also to kill Turks'" (p. 809). His observation casts doubt on the legitimacy of the nationalistic fervor that made self-sacrifice in the Serbian War a noble undertaking. The eternal commandment "Thou shalt not kill" gains new meaning and is imbued with a sense of immediacy when invoked by one like Levin who has lived through spiritual agony and torment.

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What I regard as the climactic point of the story appears in the closing scene, where Levin bares his doubts:

"As he was going into the nursery, he remembered what he had hidden from himself. It was that if the main proof of the Deity is His revelation of what is good, then why was this revelation limited to the Christian Church alone?" (pp. 813–14).

"Well, but the Jews, the Mohammedans, the Confucians, the Buddhists — what are they?... Can these hundreds of millions of people be deprived of the highest good, without which life has no meaning?" (p. 815).

I regard Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* as unparalleled in its portrayal of the spirituality and religious sentiment residing in every human soul.

Enrichment Through Reading

The extent to which serious reading and appreciation of literature can enrich and create substance in our inner world defies description. Allowing our common spiritual heritage to go to waste would be a source of deep regret.

This is true not only of Tolstoy's works. The same can be said of books by Dostoyevsky, Hugo, and Goethe, among many others. For decades, even centuries, these classics have ranked highly among a myriad of works. Surely they are replete with substance. For anyone who finds world literature daunting, there are modern classics in one's own language and children's books such as those recommended by the Jungian psychologist Hayao Kawai in Japan. The choices are endless.

There are those who would say we have become distant from the printed word. I share this concern, and it is for just this reason that I wish to extol the value of reading in one's youth. It is truly sad to find young people who have not experienced the thrilling challenge of mastering even one literary classic. It is my abiding hope that preschoolers and schoolchildren be afforded every opportunity to be exposed to reading at home as well as in school. While there is much children gain from reading on their own, the experience is further enriched when parents and teachers read aloud to them.

Children sense the warmth of words in the voices of their parents and teachers, and their imagination is challenged to capture a story's landscapes and dramatic scenes. The modulations of the reader's voice help children experience and develop a range of emotions, from sadness to joy. As parents and teachers read aloud, they can watch the children's facial expressions and choose to change their tone or pause to hear a child's thoughts. Through these encounters, a relationship of mutual trust steadily begins to take shape.

Just as a farmer sows seeds and prays for a bountiful crop, it is important for adults to read to children in the hope that they will grow up healthy and strong, limitlessly develop their potential, and realize every dream. Every facet of a child's development depends on that child's reassurance and confidence that someone believes in him or her, that someone cares.

Education and the Future

On a final note, I believe some programs sponsored by the educators division of the Soka Gakkai offer one example of reinforcing society's ability to educate.

By way of introduction, in 1968, members of the educators division, determined to contribute to their local community, launched an Educational Counseling Program. In the thirty-two years of its existence, this program has provided volunteer educational counseling services to some 280,000 people. At present, eight hundred members of the educators division

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are active as counselors in twenty-eight communities throughout Japan. All are current or retired teachers who have acquired a background in educational counseling. On a weekly basis, they provide counseling to those who are experiencing difficulties within the educational system, reinforcing their own skills through peer review of case studies. The program is open to all members of the community, without regard to religious affiliation, and all advice and counseling are given purely from a secular educational perspective.

A further program was launched in 1999 in an effort to support education in the family and the community. A designated senior educational counselor serves as a liaison with the local community, organizing informal discussions on educational issues. Eventually this system will be expanded to reach communities throughout Japan.

Due to the steady efforts of the committed individuals involved in this counseling, there are numerous stories of children who have regained their confidence and made a fresh start. To help a suffering child or parent who is feeling isolated because of various difficulties, I believe it is necessary to supplement the counseling provided by schools and by the government. Educational counseling incorporated into community services would make access to professional help easier and less intimidating. In other words, society must draw on collective efforts to help overcome the current problems in education.

According to a study of school records, absenteeism or refusal to attend school now accounts for seventy percent of the cases brought to the Educational Counseling Program. In almost half of these cases, fear of bullying is the reason children feel unable or unwilling to go to school.

In the face of these realities, we cannot remain idle. Our whole society must show a greater concern if we are to counter the problems of bullying and other acts of violence. We are in urgent need of a social ethos that will not accept or condone violence in any form. We must reverse the tide of indifference and cynicism now permeating society. The Soka Gakkai is deeply committed to raising awareness of these problems and to seeking solutions. Its efforts in this area fulfill one dimension of an overall challenge to create a society that serves the needs of education. More broadly, we are confident that these efforts are helping nurture the roots of a culture of peace.

A strengthened capacity to educate, the weaving of education into every thread of our social fabric, the permeation of a sense of commitment and a responsibility to educate — such concrete developments, and not simply politics or the economy, are what will determine the future. Our children's happiness rests in the balance. Qualified only by an overarching commitment to establish this century as the century of education, it is my earnest desire to work together with like-minded people around the world to continually swell the tide of humanistic education.

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