

## FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR ERADICATING THE EVIL OF TERRORISM

I feel a deep sense of sorrow at the incredible loss of life and destruction caused by the tragedies at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in rural Pennsylvania. Many of us are struggling with the intense pain and mixed feelings that such horrific events produce. I am sending my deepest prayers of sympathy to all who have lost a friend or loved one because of these atrocious attacks.

On September 23, I visited an SGI-USA member who lives close to the World Trade Center. He lives on the fourteenth floor of an apartment building, and his bedroom window looks down on Ground Zero. I looked out that window and thought, “Six thousand people died here. We should do gongyo for them.” We faced the site and prayed for every person lost, and that the cycle of violence would end.

Despite the devastation of September 11, this is a significant time in our movement for world peace. As Nichiren Daishonin writes, “When great evil occurs, great good follows” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1119). This is an opportunity to create the kind of change in our lives and in society that protects human civilization. These things that have happened may be beyond our present comprehension, but as we struggle to understand, we should remember that this is exactly the time when we must be courageous in our efforts.

In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” Nichiren Daishonin addresses the many calamities and tragedies of thirteenth-century Japan, “Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil” (WND, 15). In regard to the current situation, what is this one evil?

Buddhism defines evil as that which harms oneself and others. “Good” and “evil” are not separate entities. The principle of ‘three thousand realms in a single moment of life’ further explains that all ten states of life are contained within one another. Every moment of life simultaneously possesses the potential for good and evil, and even when one is manifest, the potential for the other is always present.

Because of the concept of the oneness of good and evil, we are offered a clear message of hope: that the evil events of September 11 actually have the potential for good. There is nothing in the world that is either all good or all evil. This is not to diminish the outrage and anguish we feel; rather, it’s an opportunity to strengthen our resolve to create value.

It is prudent to be cautious in what we identify as the enemy of humanity. It is definitely a mistake to consider Islam or its adherents as evil. It is evil when religious leaders are willing to sacrifice other people’s lives for their own purposes. That is a function of the darkness that exists in one’s heart. We are not faced with a philosophical or doctrinal evil; we are faced with the potential for evil that is inherent in human life.

In any religion — including ours — there may be individuals who come to power and do not act in accord with the teachings in which they claim to believe. In that case, they are functioning according to the evil in their own hearts. We must distinguish between that negative function of the human heart and the profound philosophy of the Koran. History has shown that much evil has been committed in the name of religion. That evil does not originate from the teachings of any religion; it stems from the distorted minds of the leaders who mislead people.

It is our responsibility to work to eradicate the evil of terrorism. Even though, at times like this, it may seem that we are powerless to change people’s minds, we cannot allow evil to work

its way further into society. In *For the Sake of Peace*, SGI President Ikeda advocates dialogue as a means to global harmony. He tells us that dialogue must be based on respectful compassion for all parties involved rather than rhetoric. He goes on to say: “The Buddhist approach can, I believe, loosen the shackles of abstract concepts and language that can be so destructive. Thus freed, we can use language to the greatest effect and can engage in the kind of dialogue that creates the greatest and most lasting value. Dialogue must be pivotal in our endeavors, reaching out to all people everywhere as we seek to forge a new global civilization” (p. 57).

One thing that must be done before effective and open dialogue can take place is to rid ourselves of discriminatory thinking. Shakyamuni called this an invisible arrow piercing the hearts of the people. President Ikeda elaborates further that “The ‘arrow’ symbolizes a prejudicial mindset, an unreasoning emphasis on individual differences” (p. 44). This attachment to differences enables evil to lurk in our hearts. It is virtually impossible to have respect and compassion for someone we see as lesser because of their religion, race, class or gender. It is far more valuable to see the commonality of all human beings.

In addition, the importance of education cannot be overstated when it comes to our efforts to eradicate the roots of terrorism. President Ikeda emphasized this in a recent issue of *World Tribune*: “There are a number of short-term measures that may be implemented to combat violence and terrorism, but the only viable and fundamental long-term solution is education. There is no other alternative but to educate people on the loftiest humanitarian values and views of life in order to establish a foundation of peace and stability for humankind in these times of tumultuous change” (September 28, p. 1).

Humanistic education has the power to open hearts and change minds. It can create a peaceful world by encouraging the learners to become global citizens, thereby breaking down walls of division. Humanistic education actively shows the learner that everything in life is interrelated. When people are convinced of the close relationship between themselves and the world in which they live, it becomes difficult to act in ways that devalue the existence of another.

Let’s continue and increase our efforts to create the kind of world we want to live in. Each of us has a vital mission to change our environment and spread the message of hope and peace. With united prayer and action, we will make a difference.

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