

**BECOME A POWERFUL AGENT OF SOCIETAL CHANGE
AN INVITATION TO BE HUMANE
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On August 7, 2001, Dr. Radhakrishnan was honored at the Aliso Viejo campus in California as Soka University of America's first honorary ambassador. He spoke on August 8 at SGI-USA's Los Angeles Friendship Center on the latest release by Middleway Press, *For the Sake of Peace*, a synthesis of all eighteen years of peace proposals that SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has made to the United Nations.

The following is an edited version of his comments.

Every time I meet people at an SGI function, I become more dedicated. I have a feeling on those occasions that I am meeting people who are different from the rest of the crowd. To me, you are all very special. I say "very special" because you are all privileged to be members of a global movement, the Soka Gakkai International. I don't think it is any longer an ordinary organization. It has become a global movement, a global movement for value creation.

Who creates values in the present mad rush for material advancement? Values have become a rare commodity. Our pursuit of material comforts and physical pleasures and our courting of things beyond the reach of ordinary people has had too much emphasis placed upon it.

This being the situation, value creators that you are, you have a special role to play in shaping not only your lives, but also shaping the destiny that we all share. The chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is not a mechanical process for SGI members. It is part of an earnest effort to discover oneself and relate one's inner self to external realities. It helps us realize how interdependent we are. It helps people realize how interrelated we are.

When our educational systems, our philosophies, our religions don't give us these insights, when many of the mainstream religions have become irrelevant, you have, by conviction, chosen to be part of this great movement, the Soka Gakkai International. That's why I said you are very special and you are very unique.

You are more unique because you have the leadership of Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, whom I believe to be the greatest man living today. What is he, and who is he? I am coming from a different religious background. I am a Gandhian scholar, born into a Hindu family, but for me it is very easy to understand the profound significance of what Dr. Ikeda has been doing at the individual level, local level, national level, and at the international level. I know what it means to be a part of what he has been doing, in a world where consumerism, crass materialism, greed, jealousy, pettiness, violence and intolerance dominate our day-to-day lives.

You have an all-embracing practical vision of a new man and a new woman whose capacities are infinite. You and I are endowed with infinite capacities, but do we get them in our day-to-

day life from the schools, the workplace or the home? Do we find sufficient tools to discover our real self and experience the joy of being alive, and the joy of being human? I doubt it. The importance of what is being done under the leadership of Dr. Ikeda can be analyzed and understood in this context. As a Gandhian scholar and as an activist, I see in him the living Gandhi.

When I first met Dr. Ikeda in 1984 at a conference in Tokyo, I did not know him. I had read a few books thanks to Professor Glenn D. Paige of the University of Hawaii, who encouraged me to meet with Dr. Ikeda when I would be in Tokyo. To make a long story short, that acquaintance began in 1984 and grew in depth, in content, and we have now met eleven or twelve times. This book, *For the Sake of Peace*, came to me a couple of months ago. Initially, I thought it might be a compilation of the different peace proposals the president has been making over the last eighteen years, copies of which I was also getting. But, when I started reading, I thought, “No! This is something different!”

What do we see in this book? It is a veritable history of the different aspects of Mahayana Buddhism and the role of religion in a cultural milieu where the worth of the human being is measured in terms of the money he or she possesses. In a cultural and political milieu where violence has become an all-pervading and controlling factor, in a social milieu where we are floating without much purpose, this book offers valuable guidance. The subtitle is *Seven Paths to Global Harmony*.



Dr. Ikeda is able to visualize what lies in the future. One need not be an astrologer to see what lies beyond today, and this book speaks of some of those very important aspects of our social life, our ethical life, our spiritual life and our life as responsible fellow human beings. No one has an existence of only his or her own, we are all interrelated. We are all interdependent. We have to tolerate, we have to respect all forms of life in all their glory. How can that be possible? How can nations live together without hating? How will we conquer the three enemies of hatred, greed and ignorance? How can we convert poison into medicine? The Lotus Sutra describes the ways and means of how to do it. But here is a unique leader who gives concrete guidance as to how hatred can be converted into love. The biggest enemy of our life, of our being, of our existence, is hatred and intolerance. How can we convert hatred into love, the most powerful force that binds us together?

The Soka Renaissance has spread to more than 170 countries, with many millions of people who are chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. They don't chant for selfish reasons. When they chant, they are trying to relate to the cosmic reality of life. Are they not trying to see unity? Are they not trying to create a certain kind of world that transcends racial, linguistic and cultural barriers? That is why I said right at the beginning that the SGI has become a global movement, with the laudable objective of worldwide kosen-rufu.

Kosen-rufu is not conversion. Let it not be misunderstood. Kosen-rufu is an invitation to be humane. Kosen-rufu is a dedicated effort on the part of millions of people to work together to experience the joy of living together. In our day-to-day life, are we not losing the ability to work together? The reality of today and tomorrow is that we are going to be multilingual, we are going to be multiracial, and we are going to be multireligious. It's coexistence. How do you promote coexistence unless you respect your neighbor? And the essence of worldwide kosen-rufu is a new humanism that transcends narrow confines and narrow interpretations of religion.

So let us understand that kosen-rufu will not be effective unless it is propelled by the force

of a new human revolution. And the new human revolution that Dr. Ikeda speaks about is based upon the infinite potential of every human being — the force of each person to be a powerful agent of transformation, of change with consent. Transform yourself, as Shakyamuni Buddha said long, long ago. How do we do that? This again necessitates the movement to be founded on values. What are the values that we are seeking? Are they going to be values devolved of ethics, morality and spirituality? The market decides your value, now, please understand. We are all commodities. We are not human beings.

It is here that Dr. Ikeda reminds us: “Look here! You are all powerful, responsible human beings. You are not commodities.” Now, the choice is yours. Do you want to be a mere commodity, or do you want to be a human being? What is it that makes us different from animals? Our pets? It is our morality. Our pets have greater morality than many moneymaking machines nowadays. Otherwise, we would not kill human beings the way we have been. We would not deny human beings basic facilities as we have been doing. So, the values that are fast eroding are to be brought into the center of human endeavor. That is why I support the SGI. That is why I admire the efforts of Dr. Ikeda. That is why I respect him as a great leader.



What especially attracted me to *For the Sake of Peace* are Dr. Ikeda’s comments on compassion, interconnectedness and absolute respect for all human beings. These are rooted in the life affirmation found in the value of dialogue. There is an absence of dialogue even at the individual level. In many families there is absolutely no dialogue. Everybody’s busy. We come home and immediately head for that idiot box — the television. The child has no time to talk to each parent. The mother has no time to talk to the child. And the husband and wife are very busy. They have no time to talk to one another.

And most families are nuclear families, and the older parents become burden. We deposit them. We dump them. We remember them on Christmas day. We remember our wonderful parents on certain days, whenever they are convenient to us. Parents have become unnecessary irritants. If this is what is happening at the personal level, what is happening at a societal level? We are all busy at our workplace. Even when we are driving, we drive with one hand and with the other hand we are talking on the phone. I saw someone who was working on his laptop in the car. He was trying to send an email. I’m not undermining the importance of all these things. But let us ask for a moment, where will these things take us? It is important to stop a minute and ask ourselves, “What is it that ultimately I am gaining?” “What is it that is happening to me as a human being?” There’s a difference between a machine and a human being.

Long ago, in 1904, Gandhi was asked a question: “Are we against science and technology? People say you are against science. People say you are against technology.” His answer was: “I am not against science and technology. But I am against that science and technology which makes human beings subservient to machines. Science and technology should not dictate and control your life. Science and technology should be in our hands.” I am not belittling the importance of science and technology. It is here that the importance of dialogue at a personal level comes in.

But Dr. Ikeda is a visionary, one who is able to see what is lying ahead far beyond. He is talking about the dialogue of civilizations. Dialogue not even of nations, but dialogue of civilizations. I would like to assess this particular concept. This concept is a great one. Please understand that here is a philosopher, an educator, who believes that a multi-lingual spectrum, an inter-religious understanding, a multicultural diversity and coexistence have come to stay. There is no way war will change that. War has never solved any problem anywhere. War has

created more problems. Violence begets violence, while nonviolence removes bitterness. And what is the way, other than encouraging the dialogue of civilizations?

So, friends, between yourselves, at your level, in your community, in your office, in your home, if you can understand the significance of dialogue as an inescapable and important matter, to relate yourself to fellow human beings, that is yet another aspect of human revolution. Human revolution is a very big frame. You can't point to a few things and say, "This is human revolution, this is human revolution and this is human revolution." It covers the whole gamut of your life and my life.

We are fast becoming a community of faithless people. To have deep faith is a virtue. Faith in religion is one of the greatest virtues, and the importance of religions cannot be slighted or dismissed. How did mankind reach the third millennium? Let us remember, from the cannibalistic beast that our forefathers once were, the long way that we have traveled was made possible by religion. Some religions have become violent, and I admit they have become instruments of conflict, but you might know Buddhism is the only religion that spread by the sheer content of its life-vision. It is the only religion in known history that never took up the sword to propagate its philosophy. And even in contemporary times, when other religions are becoming fast redundant, it is spreading. It is spreading because people see great promise in it. And Mahayana Buddhism as it is being understood today probably is the hope of the future. Long ago, we had imprisoned religion in textbooks, in holy books. But religion has to enter the very life of each one of us. It has to become a motivating force. It has to become the guiding principle in our life.

Another important aspect of this dialogue, the dialogue of civilizations, is helping people out of the mental wilderness. We are all prisoners in one sense. We are all people who are lost and have gotten ourselves into a certain kind of wilderness. We don't realize it. There is so much darkness inside. We do not know how much internal wilderness there is in each one of us. For the removal of that, you need conscious effort, through commitment, through dedication, through rededication and determination. And determined we are in the realization of the objective of worldwide kosen-rufu. It is becoming a reality. And in this, you and I should realize that all changes start at the individual level. We want others to change, always. The inspired human being, every individual, becomes an agent of change. I remember once Gandhi was asked about his philosophy of life. He said: "I have no philosophy as such. My life is my message."



And from this individual change, we move to another area of emancipation of the human spirit — relieving suffering. This is not unrelated to what we are trying to do at the personal level. It is here that *For the Sake of Peace* offers us guidance on self-mastery, tolerance and dialogue, the role of community, the role of culture, the role of nations, the role of global awareness and the role of global disarmament.

These classifications and ideals are very close to what Gandhi himself said on a different occasion, that the means to peace are: 1) selfless service; 2) right and fair labor; 3) nonviolence; 4) conciliation; 5) share in government; 6) reeducation; 7) sharing of resources. But Dr. Ikeda here again invites our attention when he says there are several barriers to peace. What are those barriers to peace? They are: 1) isolationism, 2) illusion of efficiency, 3) greed, 4) poverty, 5) environmental irresponsibility and 6) nuclear negativity. This is how he looks at it. Please see how holistic he is when he looks at the complexities of it.

I would like to close my observations by drawing your attention to two more aspects. As Dr. Ikeda himself points out in his book, there is a Latin expression that "if you want peace,

prepare for war.” But he says, “No, if you desire peace, prepare for peace!” And in that, unless we are able to change poison into medicine, and hatred into love, and the dialogue of civilizations becomes a reality, which is all controlled by a very finely developed worldwide kosen-rufu, the lives of our grandchildren will be in danger. The planet Earth will be in danger. The human species will be in danger. Friends, I profusely thank you for your immense patience. You have tolerated me — you have shown how tolerant you are! But then you are all disciples of Dr. Ikeda. You can’t be otherwise.

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