

RENEWING OUR FAITH IN HUMANITY BY SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA

SGI President Ikeda wrote the following essay in response to the tragedy of Sept. 11.

In the aftermath of the terrible shock of the tragic events on Sept. 11, I extend my deepest sympathies to all those affected. From the bottom of my heart, I pray for the victims, and I pray that their families may find inner strength, healing and, eventually, renewed happiness.

It is impossible not to be outraged at the senseless loss of so many lives. And yet it is not the numbers that make this tragedy so horrific. Every single person lost was irreplaceable and immensely precious — a much-loved sister, father, son, mother or friend. Each individual's life contained infinite possibilities waiting to be realized. In the most terrible manner imaginable, we have been reminded of the immense value of human life.

In all its teachings, Buddhism stresses how sacred and precious life — especially human life — is. One scripture reads: "A single day of life is worth more than all the treasures of the universe." Terrorism, which so cruelly robs people of life, can never be excused or justified by any reason or cause. It is an absolute evil. And when such acts are committed in the name of religion, it demonstrates the utter spiritual bankruptcy of the perpetrators.

As human beings sharing a common home, we have all been impacted by this terrible deed. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We must unite across differences of nationality and faith in order to create a world free of injustice, violence and terror.

I call for a just and equitable international tribunal to be established to try those responsible for acts of terrorism and other crimes against humanity.

But the struggle against terrorism requires more than short-term international cooperation. It requires a profound reexamination of the nature of human civilization. For much of our history, humanity has been trapped in vicious cycles of hatred and reprisal. We must redouble our efforts to break this cycle and transform distrust into trust. I believe that this is the most effective and fundamental antidote to terrorism and its repugnant worship of violence.

It is the function of evil to divide; to alienate people from each other and divide one country from another. The universe, this world and our own lives, are the stage for a ceaseless struggle between hatred and compassion, the destructive and constructive aspects of life. We must never let up, confronting evil at every turn.

This attack was an ultimate manifestation of evil and shows us the vilest depths to which human nature can sink. In the end, the evil over which we must triumph is the impulse toward hatred and destruction that resides in us all.

Unless we can achieve a fundamental transformation within our own lives, so that we are able to perceive our intimate connection with all our fellow human beings and feel their sufferings as our own, we will never be free of conflict and war. In this sense, I feel that a "hard power" approach, one that relies on military might, will not lead to a long-term, fundamental resolution.

I believe that dialogue holds the key to any lasting solution. Now, more than ever, we must reach out in a further effort to understand each other and engage in genuine dialogue. Words spoken from the heart have the power to change a person's life. They can even melt the icy walls of mistrust that separate peoples and nations. We must expand our efforts to promote dialogue between and among civilizations.

I am utterly convinced that we were not born into this world to hate and destroy each other. We must restore and renew our faith in humanity and in each other. We must never lose sight of the fact that we can still make the twenty-first century an era free from the flames of war and violence — an era in which all people may live in peace. To this end, we must strive to make a profound reverence for life the prevailing spirit of our times and our planet. I believe that this is the greatest and most enduring way to honor the memory of the victims of this enormous tragedy.

September 22, 2001

REFLECTIONS ON THE TERRORIST ATTACKS BY DR. DAVID KRIEGER

David Krieger is the president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. An interview with him appeared in the August issue. More information on this and other critical issues of peace may be found at the Foundation's Web site: www.wagingpeace.org.

The plunging airliners, commandeered by terrorists, ripped gaping holes in more than the towers of the World Trade Center. They ripped away the veneer of security that we believed surrounded us. We in America can never again feel secure in the same way.

We were vulnerable before the hurtling planes crashed into the World Trade Center, but we never stopped to think that this could happen to us. Now we understand our vulnerability, and our lives will never be the same.

What madmen seek to kill us? Are the plans for the next attacks already set in motion? Are there more suicidal phantoms, coiled like cobras, in our midst? We remain apprehensive with good reason.

Some Americans are calling for vengeance. But we are fighting phantoms, and our military power is not sufficient to assure an end to future threats. It will not be so easy to find these terrorists and bring them to justice.

The best of America is on display. Heroism abounds. Americans are coming together to mourn their losses, to grieve, to comfort and care for each other, and to begin rebuilding. All Americans have a piece of that gaping hole in their hearts.

Justice must be done, and we need to find those responsible for the crimes committed. But our response to those crimes must be legal under international law, moral in not causing the deaths and injuries of more innocent people, and thoughtful in asking why this has occurred and what can be done to end the cycle of violence.

Vengeance may reassure some that our power matters. But vengeance will not protect us. It will only create more who despair and hate, more who are ready to rip at the heart of America.

Until all are secure, none will be. The violence could grow even worse because the weapons in our world can kill so massively. Nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons all hover around us. Will we take the necessary steps to end these threats?

There are deeper issues that we must explore. These include questions about who we are and what we are doing in the world and to the world. In the end, our only way out is to climb through the hole in our hearts until we find our full humanity.

The only way we can mend our hearts is to recognize our oneness with all humanity. For better or worse, we share a common shadow and a common fate. We cannot change the past, but we can begin building a more peaceful and decent world today.