YOUTH STUDY FEBRUARY
THE FIRST PLACE TO FIND SOLUTIONS IS WITHIN
BY KEN SARAGOSA, ORANGE COUNTY, CALIF.

Of course, efforts to control violence by external measures such as the elimination of weapons of destruction, the establishment of more adequate laws, and the signing of treaties between nations are also important. But violence stems from the animality that is inherent in life. Even if we eliminate all weapons from the face of the earth, violence will never disappear unless we successfully control the animality within us. That is why transforming ourselves from within is so important (SGI President Ikeda's discussion with SGI-USA youth representatives, Feb. 25, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 5).

Why does Buddhism always emphasize changing ourselves first? Whenever there is any kind of a problem — problems with difficult people at work, problems within a community, problems at school or at home — we hear about how we have to start with ourselves, change our karma and change ourselves from within. What does that mean?

In the quotation above, President Ikeda is discussing the issue of violence in society. Violence is a problem between nations, but it is also a problem between individuals. And, while we must act together to reform laws and change society as a whole, President Ikeda reminds us that "violence will never disappear unless we successfully control the animality within us."

Violence seems to be the ultimate expression of something external that is hurting us. It can be in the form of someone with some kind of power over us asserting himself, or it might be the expression of people who feel powerless and who feel that lashing out in anger is the only way that they can gain some measure of power in their lives. But fundamentally, the urge to dominate, to gain power or control, is what is behind violence.

In 1990, President Ikeda gave a speech at Harvard University in which he talked about "hard power" and "soft power." Hard power refers to physical force, military might or political power. Soft power refers to information, knowledge, culture and ideas.

At first, the difference seems to be between using gentle means to get what we want versus forceful means (sort of like gentle manipulation rather than physical force). But in truth, the difference is between external power and internal power. Or, put another way, it's between doing something because you're told to and doing something because you want to. President Ikeda explains that hard power means using "tools of coercion to move people" whereas soft power depends on individuals freely choosing how they will act. "[Soft power] is an internally generated energy of will created through consensus and understanding among people. The processes of soft power unleash the inner energies of the individual."

In a way, violence is a crisis in relationships; it represents a breakdown in communication. Buddhism teaches us that creating harmonious relationships based on respect and communication is what we ought to strive for. In our relationships with others, it means that we don't insist that others accept our views. Instead, we need to cultivate the ability to explain things to people, to reason with them, to speak

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Keywords: February Find First Place Seize Solutions Study Within Youth

using our heart, our sincerity and our intelligence. This is true at work, in our friendships and in all our personal relationships.

But most of all, developing good relationships — ones which don't result in a violent breakdown — is about self-control. We don't have a whole lot of control over how other people feel or what other people do. But we have almost total control over our own feelings and actions. This is why Buddhism directs us to ourselves — to change what we have the ability to change.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does it make sense to change ourselves first? Are there some problems that seem too big? Does it sometimes seem to make more sense to change the outside first?

2. Does anyone have any experiences addressing "big" problems through their own individual efforts?

3. Discuss *hard* and *soft* power. What are some examples of *hard power* in your life? Are there examples of *soft power* in your life? How can you transform *hard power* into *soft power* in your life?

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