

Living BUDDHISM

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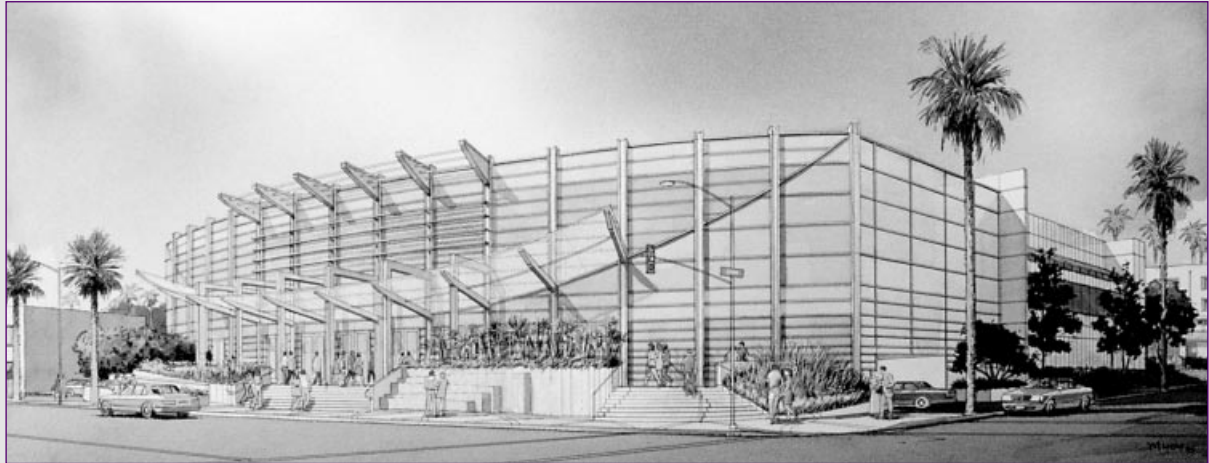


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COVER: The reading of an imaginative story finds expression on the faces of boys and girls at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center. (see page 22). Photo by Kirk Condyles.

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An architect's drawing of renovations to the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium scheduled to be opened in 2001.

What are the SGI & Living Buddhism Magazine?

Living Buddhism is the study journal for Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA), an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of the Nichiren school of Mahayana Buddhism. SGI-USA works in association with 75 other SGI organizations comprising members in more than half the world's countries. SGI-USA activities are driven by our understanding of the inseparable link between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity of our diverse communities. Our religious teachings place the highest emphasis on the sanctity of life.

Through their Buddhist faith and practice, our members aim to improve their lives by taking up the challenge to create value, to live without fear, to take responsibility for their circumstances, to care for their families and to live with compassion for others.

What we believe...

Our core philosophy is expressed in the concept of human revolution, a process of inner transformation that centers on the idea that the causes we make through our thoughts, words and actions have influence that extends beyond their immediate context to affect the vast and complex web of life. Through undergoing our individual human revolution, we awaken to the responsibility we each have for our own circumstances and for our environment. Our inner transformation will lead us to take the actions that bring about personal fulfillment and help us contribute to the harmony and healthy development of society. These ideals are based on the Buddhist worldview of dependent origination, a concept of interrelation where all things in the realms of humanity and nature are dependent upon each other for their existence and nothing can exist in isolation.

The Buddhist tradition...

The roots of the SGI-USA worldview can be traced to the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,500 years ago in what is modern-day Nepal. His enlightenment to eternal, universal reality was most succinctly articulated

in the Lotus Sutra. Following Shakyamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra spread through Central Asia into China and Japan.

In the 13th century, Nichiren Daishonin revealed the truth hidden in the Lotus Sutra. According to Nichiren Buddhism, the workings of the universe are an expression of a single principle or Law — Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra. By putting their lives in rhythm with this Law, individuals can unlock their hidden potential — the Buddha nature — and achieve creative harmony with the environment. Nichiren Buddhism is a vehicle of individual empowerment — that is, individuals have within themselves, the power to transform the inevitable sufferings of life into happiness and to be a positive influence in the community.

The SGI Heritage...

The SGI organization has its origin in the educational theory of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose quest to understand the deepest meaning of life eventually led to his encounter with Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Here, he discovered a philosophy that recognized and sought to develop the wisdom inherent in all human beings. The term *soka gakkai* (value-creation society) was first used by Makiguchi in 1930 when he founded the lay organization. During World War II, Makiguchi and his disciple Josei Toda were imprisoned for their opposition to the war. Makiguchi died in prison within eighteen months at the age of 73. After the war, Toda rebuilt the organization and it achieved remarkable growth until his death in 1958. On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president. Under his leadership, the organization has grown to its present membership of 12 million in 165 countries and territories.

Based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, SGI President Ikeda has founded the Soka School System which includes universities in Japan and the United States. He is also the founder of the Toda Peace Institute, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, and more. He is the author of numerous books that have been translated into many languages and has received world-wide recognition for his peace efforts.

GLOSSARY

Buddha

“Enlightened One.” One who perceives the true nature of all life and leads others to attain the same enlightenment. The Buddha nature exists in all beings and is characterized by the qualities of wisdom, courage, compassion and life force.

Gohonzon

The fundamental object of devotion in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. It is the embodiment of the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, expressing in graphic form the life-state of Buddhahood, which all people inherently possess. *Go* means *worthy of honor* and *honzon* means *object of fundamental respect*.

Karma

Sanskrit word meaning *action*. The life tendency or destiny each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds that exert an often unseen influence over one’s future.

Kosen-rufu

Literally, it means to *widely declare and spread* (Buddhism); to secure lasting peace and happiness for all humankind through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Lotus Sutra

The highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, it reveals that all people can attain enlightenment and declares that his former teachings should be regarded as preparatory. Reciting excerpts from the Lotus Sutra is part of SGI members’ daily Buddhist practice.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo

The fundamental law expounded in

Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, it expresses the true aspect of life. Chanting it allows people to directly tap their enlightened nature. Although the deepest meaning of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is revealed only through its practice, the literal meaning is: *Nam* (devotion), the action of practicing Buddhism; *myoho* (Mystic Law), the essential law of the universe and its phenomenal manifestations; *enge* (lotus), the simultaneity of cause and effect; *kyo* (Buddha’s teaching), all phenomena.

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82)

The founder of the Buddhism upon which the SGI bases its activities. He inscribed the true object of devotion, the Gohonzon, for the observation of one’s mind and established the invocation of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo as the universal practice for attaining enlightenment. *Daishonin* is an honorific title that means *great sage*.

Shakyamuni

Also known as Siddhartha Gautama. Born in India (present day southern Nepal) about twenty-five hundred years ago, he is the first recorded Buddha and founder of Buddhism. For fifty years, he expounded various sutras (teachings) culminating in the Lotus Sutra, which he declared his ultimate teaching.

Ten Worlds

Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven (or Rapture), Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. The Ten Worlds are also interpreted as states of life.

living BUDDHISM

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Frequently Cited Sources

For convenience, all citations from the following works will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows after the first listing:

— *The Writings of Nichiren*

Daishonin: **WND**, followed by the page number.

— *Gosho Zenshu*: (The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin in Japanese) **GZ**, followed by the page number.

— *The Lotus Sutra*, by Burton Watson: **LS**, followed by the chapter and page number.

SELF-REFORMATION

Is the Engine of Our Movement

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*. I recently returned from visiting thirty cities across the United States. I was happy to see so many of you again! I listened to your reports of the struggles you have been going through, but each story was punctuated with joy — the joy of overcoming hardship and the joy that comes from striving to transform your lives. Thank you for inspiring me. It is truly the drama of individual self-reformation that is the engine of our organization and the purpose of our movement.

Last May, SGI President Ikeda wrote many meaningful poems including “Our Brilliant May 3” to commemorate that significant date. On May 3 itself, he wrote “The Indestructible Power of the People.” In addition, to commemorate the first Mother’s Day of the new century, he wrote, “The 21st Century is the Century of Women.” Each of these poems is of substantial length, and must have taken so much effort to write. Moreover, each expresses a deep feeling of appreciation and praise for all of our efforts, as well as a grand vision for the future.

Though each poem is unique, one theme pervades them: the theme of victory. President Ikeda begins “Our Brilliant May 3”:

*Finally, we have won!
You and I have won!*

*We have triumphed,
Amid cheers and jubilation,
We have triumphed,
Overcoming every obstacle and hardship.*

The conclusion to his poem dedicated to mothers reads:

*I have won.
You have won.
We have definitely won!
That is the declaration
Of Nichiren Daishonin and Shakyamuni Buddha.*

And in “The Indestructible Power of the People,” he writes that victory of the people is the essence of the SGI.

*Whatever happens,
Our movement of ten million friends —
Powerfully united
In faith and spirit
And the cause of truth and justice —
Constitutes a great movement of the people
That will go down forever in history.*

All of these poems attest to the victory that we have accomplished during the last seventy years of the twentieth century. We have developed a global movement of peace, culture and education, and millions of people have awakened to the practice of human revolution.

These poems also attest to the victories that each one of us has won in our daily struggles to live in the real world. The fact is, we practice Buddhism to be victorious in our lives — to overcome our suffering, to purify our lives, and to create beautiful and harmonious relationships. Therefore, the real meaning of victory is to win over ourselves.

“...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.”

As President Ikeda writes in his most recent education proposal (see page 22): “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.” What this means is that the purpose of our practice is to achieve individual victory. Such individual victories — a collection of “human revolutions” — become our collective victory, and indeed, the victory of our society.

I have this conviction based on my own experience. My mother raised me by herself. She was ill and because of the various difficulties she faced, she had to work as an independent vendor. When I look back, I can’t believe how hard she worked in order to support our family. While I was a teenager, I gave her so much difficulty and got into so much trouble. But during this time, she also dedicated herself wholeheartedly to activities for the sake of others, within the Soka Gakkai. She did so with the conviction that this was the most meaningful way she could live her life. At the same time, she was certain that by exerting herself wholeheartedly, she was establishing fortune and would thereby transform the negative circumstances of her life.

My mother died five years ago. She was financially secure and had lived to an advanced age. She completely transformed her life by overcoming poverty, illness and the difficulties of having me for a son.

Looking back over my life, I know that ninety-five percent of my fortune, ninety-five percent of my character, ninety-five percent of who I am is because of my mother. I would not be the man I am today; I would not be able to take responsibility for kosen-rufu, if not for her consistent and selfless dedication. Ultimately, it was President Ikeda’s encouragement

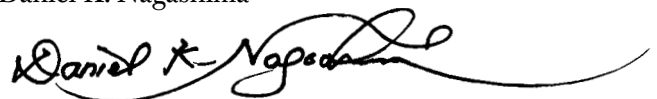
and inspiration that allowed her to develop the tenacity to overcome her difficulties and polish her life. It is because of my mother that I was able to meet President Ikeda — my mentor in life.

From my experience, I want to stress that the real victory is not only what we get at the end of our struggle, but is also the struggle itself based on faith and conviction. In other words, living with a noble sense of mission, developing profound confidence that no matter what happens, we are creating value and a meaningful history with our lives — this, too, is the meaning of victory in our lives.

This summer, we are engaged in preparations for our family youth festivals across the United States. I hope that we don’t see these events as ends unto themselves, but as opportunities to care for others and to learn more about the practice of faith. In this way, organizational activities are motivated by our desire to achieve victory in our own lives and to support the growth and development of others. The study of the Daishonin’s teachings and President Ikeda’s guidance in our publications is also crucial to our growth and development and will provide us with a solid foundation for this summer’s success. This success is especially important when we think in terms of our worldwide kosen-rufu movement. Let’s use these festivals as a vehicle to introduce others to the power of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Again, thank you very much. Please take care during these hot summer months.

Daniel K. Nagashima



SGI-USA General Director

The Five

5

Impurities

From its inception, Buddhism has been concerned with the questions, “Why do people suffer?” and “How can suffering be alleviated?” Many Buddhist teachings have sought to clarify the relationship between the cause and the treatment of misery. For this reason, Shakyamuni enumerates the five impurities in the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. They are as follows: impurity of the age, impurity of desire, impurity of living beings, impurity of view and impurity of life span.

Perhaps these five impurities seem like a list of “sins” as with the Ten Commandments of Christianity. But upon closer inspection, they are not so much a group of transgressions as they are, collectively, an elaboration on the relationship between a person and the environment — and on a broader scale, between a culture and a country, or even the entire populace and the world in which we live. To make sense of this, let’s look at each impurity individually.

The “impurity of the age” refers to destructive and chaotic acts in the social, economic and natural environments. War, for example, is an “impurity of the age” as is a terrible financial depression, or the oppression of a particular group of people. It is the visible end of the spectrum of mass unease and desperation.

The very normal needs for food, shelter, companionship and so forth — when polluted by negative tendencies such as greed, anger and ignorance — result in the “impurity of desire.” There is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to eat, but when

greed and ignorance temper the need for food, a person can lose their generosity or even become a thief, which can in turn leave someone else hungry. In this manner, healthy desires can become destructive and difficult to control. When one adds to this equation the terrible lack of basic needs often brought about by war, economic collapse and other “impurities of the age,” this can lead to even further desperation and be the means by which greed, anger and ignorance pollute our natural and appropriate desires.

Desires, when destructive, can lead to mental and physical illness. This is the “impurity of living beings.” Either directly to ourselves (psychosomatic illness, neurosis, malnutrition, etc.) or indirectly to others (diseases related to poverty and social inequality, mental disorders derived from abuse) we see the anguish caused by the “impurity of desire” translated into the “impurity of living beings” all around us.

Similar to the “impurity of desire” is the “impurity of view” — the adherence to erroneous beliefs. Misunderstandings about the interdependence of life (the shared causal connection between all people) are particularly problematic. This is because such beliefs promote the mistaken concept that a person is isolated and one’s actions have no relation to the lives of others, or conversely that one has inordinate power and can “fix” or “control” another human being. Rooted in warped desires worsened by mental or physical imbalance, the “impurity of view” can become a philosophy of hate, senseless destruction and violence.

Lastly, the “impurity of life span” describes a life

shortened or distorted because of the negative effects of the other impurities. Every day people die young because of war, starvation, crime and other dangerous situations. But the “impurity of life span” can also be interpreted as lives nullified, or rendered joyless and unrewarding; lives, in other words, that don’t seem to be worth living. Such deadened, soulless feelings can occur at any age.

Taken all together, it’s clear that the five impurities are neither a list nor a chain, but a loop, a vicious cycle. Referring to this cycle, Shakyamuni says, “Shariputra, when the age is impure and the times are chaotic, then the defilements of living beings are grave, they are greedy and jealous and put down roots that are not good” (LS2, 32). One impurity leads easily to the next and creates a seemingly endless repetition of sorrow.

It’s important to remember, however, that the cumulative effect of a person’s causes, or karma, is not solely a negative thing. Karma is a law, like gravity, not a judge doling out punishment. Because the cycle of the five impurities works in one direction, it must logically work in the other direction as well. In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Therefore

you must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle...If you do so, then the threefold world will become the Buddha land...” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 25). If the five impurities weren’t reversible, the Daishonin would never have said that.

As a very simple example, the prevention of a war — or better still, the establishment of peaceful international relationships — can save many lives and lead to an increase in trade, jobs and so forth by which we can feed ourselves and our families. When such needs are appropriately met, mental strife and many illnesses are less common and people are more likely to lead long, healthy lives. This is, of course, a simple illustration.

Though war, theft, oppression and the like can bring about brief periods of wealth and security for some, they are unstable acts incapable of establishing any long-term prosperity. In the end, such acts merely lead back to the cycle of suffering. Nonviolent activities, inspired by mutual respect, are far more likely to bring about long-lasting value. ☸

By Jason Henninger, based on *Yasashii Kyogaku* (Easy Buddhist Study) published by *Seikyo Press* in 1994.

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Passages to Victory (5)

Facing the INEVITABLE

Particular passages from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin have become favorites of those who practice his Buddhism. This series introduces some of those passages and the people whose lives they have impacted, proving that it is, indeed, a living Buddhism.

"If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-enge-kyo. Chanting Myoho-enge-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life.... Your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death in the least unless you perceive the true nature of your life" ("On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime," The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 3).

BY KIMBERLY DAVIS, CHICAGO

BACKGROUND: This letter was written to Toki Jonin in 1260, two years after Nichiren Daishonin established his teaching of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. "On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime" is one of the writings that focuses most clearly on the tenets of his Buddhism. It reveals the concrete practice for attaining Buddhahood, namely chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.



I was attacking a problem head-on, but it took years for me to see that I was actually avoiding the inevitable.

I was diagnosed with fibroid tumors in 1992. Surgery was recommended, but at that time, I chose trying to heal myself through making lifestyle changes and my Buddhist practice. I didn't like the idea of having my body cut open. However, I wasn't always consistent with those

changes or my practice. Meanwhile, my tumors were getting worse.

Finally, one day three years later, I passed out at work. I was admitted to the hospital and it was discovered that my blood count was low and dropping quickly. I needed a blood transfusion. The doctor informed me that I needed to have the tumors removed; they were causing me to bleed profusely. I had to be placed on medication for seven months to

Difficult situations will arise in our lives from time to time. When they come along, we can make one of two choices: we can retreat or face our problems head-on with the determination to resolve them. A situation arose where I thought

build up my blood count so I could have surgery. The side effects of the medication were intense. I went through a menopausal state, gained thirty-five pounds and became depressed.

I finally accepted the fact that my way of healing myself was not working and had my first surgery in January 1996. Afterward, my doctor told me the tumors were covering the area where a baby would sit and that was causing the excessive bleeding. Even if had wanted to, I could not have gotten pregnant. I had to go through the same procedure the next month to remove more tumors and correct the cause of bleeding from the first surgery.

The surgery did not affect my business (I own a hair salon) because it was an outpatient procedure and I only had to be off my feet for a few days. I felt no pain and everything seemed to return to normal. However, I still had other tumors and once the medication I was taking wore off, they would have to be removed too.

In 1997, I started to feel pain in my stomach. I saw my doctor for a routine visit and he said to me, “Kim, you’re going to have to make a decision about this soon because the tumors are growing and they have to come out.” The longer I waited, the larger the fibroids became. I again tried to resolve this problem without more surgery, but I wasn’t consistent with my regimen.

When I saw my doctor in May 1999, he was more concerned than he had been in the past, particularly about my ability to conceive. He was unsure about my health and the outcome of additional surgery. Consequently, I lost confidence in him and became even more firm in my decision not to have another surgery.

In December 1999, I felt pain like I had never experienced in the pit of my stomach while doing sit-ups. This time, another doctor examined me. This doctor shared my views on holistic healing, which was important to me. He determined that the fibroids were the size of a five-month-old fetus! I was worried but my new doctor was encouraging and confident. We seemed to be in accord spiritually; I felt like I was talking to a Buddhist. He convinced me that it really was time I had the surgery. Afterward, he said he

would start me on a natural-herb treatment to rebuild my body and health. He was confident I could become pregnant later. My other doctor thought I might have to have a hysterectomy.

We set a date for surgery in February 2000 but because of my finances, I decided to wait until September. I wanted to catch up on my bills before adding more. By September, my bills were still not current and I had been unable to save any money. I rescheduled surgery for October 6, 2000.

I had no idea what to do about my financial situation. I sat in front of the Gohonzon and said to myself, “I am ready to let go of these emotions and negative energy.” I wrote down my goals and chanted. My first goal was to have the best medical team. My second goal was a successful surgery — that they would only have to remove the tumors and not my uterus. My third goal was to return to work within six weeks and fulfill my financial obligations. Little did I know that at that moment, the day of reckoning was upon me.

There were thirty-seven benign tumors present, but only thirty-five could be removed because the other two were so deep inside me, it would have been too risky to attempt to remove them, but I was able to keep my uterus. I had a great medical team and returned home in four days. I received tremendous support from friends, family and SGI-USA members.

But I was dealing with more than my physical problems. Two weeks later, I became so depressed that I wished I were dead. Not only did I have to deal with the effects of having major surgery, but I was also facing severe financial problems. My mortgage and utility payments were late. The payroll for my business was late and so was my car payment. I had also broken up with my boyfriend. I was used to being in control and I felt like my whole world was falling apart. I was angry that I had so much suffering at one time. It was not until I received a visit from my SGI-USA leaders, Michael and Valerie Ewing, that I began to understand what was happening.

Michael read passages to me from “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime” and Valerie explained

continued on page 48

The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin

“The Selection of the Time”

(*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 579–80, *Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 287–88)

The following is an excerpt from “The Selection of the Time,” the study material for August study meetings in the SGI-USA.

In the secular texts it says, “A sage is one who fully understands those things that have not yet made their appearance.” And in the Buddhist texts it says, “A sage is one who knows the three existences of life — past, present, and future.”

Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge. The first time was the first year of the Bunno era (1260), cyclical sign *kanoe-saru*, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month, when I presented my *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* to His Lordship, the lay priest of Saimyo-ji, by way of the lay priest Yadoya Mitsunori.¹ At that time, I said to the lay priest Yadoya, “Please advise His Lordship that devotion to the Zen school and the Nembutsu school should be abandoned. If this advice is not heeded, trouble will break out within the ruling clan, and the nation will be attacked by another country.”

The second time was the twelfth day of the ninth month of the eighth year of the Bun’ei era (1271), at the hour of the monkey (3:00–5:00 P.M.), when I said to Hei no Saemon-no-jo: “Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan. Doing away with me is toppling the pillar of Japan! Immediately you will

all face ‘the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain,’ or strife among yourselves, and also ‘the calamity of invasion from foreign lands.’ Not only will the people of our nation be put to death by foreign invaders, but many of them will be taken prisoner. All the Nembutsu and Zen temples, such as Kencho-ji, Jufuku-ji, Gokuraku-ji, Daibutsu-den, and Choraku-ji, should be burned to the ground, and their priests taken to Yui Beach to have their heads cut off. If this is not done, then Japan is certain to be destroyed!”

The third time was the eighth day of the fourth month of last year (the eleventh year of the Bun’ei era), when I said to Saemon-no-jo: “Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler’s domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart. There can be no doubt that the Nembutsu leads to the hell of incessant suffering, and that the Zen school is the work of the heavenly devil. And the True Word school in particular is a great plague to this nation of ours. The task of praying for victory over the Mongols should not be entrusted to the True Word priests! If so grave a matter is entrusted to them, then the situation will only worsen rapidly and our country will face destruction.”

[Hei no Saemon-no-jo] Yoritsuna then asked, “When do you think the Mongols will attack?”

I replied, “The sacred scriptures do not indicate the time. But the signs show that heaven is extremely angry. It would appear that the attack is imminent. It will probably occur before this year has ended.”

Yet it was not I, Nichiren, who made these three important pronouncements. Rather it was in all cases the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni that had entered into my body. And having personally experienced this, I am beside myself with joy.

This is the all-important doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life taught in the Lotus Sutra. What does the Lotus Sutra mean when it says, “This reality [the true aspect of all phenomena] consists of the

appearance...”?”² “Appearance,” the first of the ten factors of life, is the most important of them all; this is why the Buddha appeared in the world. “Wise men can perceive the cause of things, as snakes know the way of snakes.”

Little streams come together to form the great ocean, and tiny particles of dust accumulate to form Mount Sumeru. When I, Nichiren, first took faith in the Lotus Sutra, I was like a single drop of water or a single particle of dust in all the country of Japan. But later, when two people, three people, ten people, and eventually a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, and a million people come to recite the Lotus Sutra and transmit it to others, then they will form a Mount Sumeru of perfect enlightenment, an ocean of great nirvana. Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood!

Background

The Selection of the Time” is one of Nichiren Daishonin’s ten major writings selected by Nikko Shonin in his “On the Matters That the Believers of the Fuji School Must Know” (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1604–05). Among the ten major writings, it ranks as one of the five major writings along with “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” “The Opening of the Eyes,” “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” and “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude.”

The Daishonin wrote “The Selection of the Time” in 1275. It was entrusted to a believer named Yui who lived in Nishiyama of Suruga Province (present-day Shizuoka Prefecture). The recipient is believed to have been related to the family of Nikko Shonin’s mother, Myofukutama. The Daishonin was fifty-four and living on

Mt. Minobu at the time of this writing. He had settled in Minobu the previous year to educate disciples and establish a foundation for the future propagation of his teachings. As with a number of his other important works, “The Selection of the Time” is written in the format of a dialogue between the Daishonin and a hypothetical questioner.

In October 1274, the Mongols had launched some 900 warships carrying 25,000 men in a massive amphibious attack on the southern islands of Japan. Untimely storms frustrated the attempt. But the invasion — the first in Japan’s history — threw the nation into profound anxiety. To the Japanese it was one more stark indication that they were indeed living in the Latter Day of the Law, the dreaded “degenerate age,” when Buddhism would decline and enlightenment would be virtually

impossible to attain. “The Selection of the Time,” however, sets forth a quite different view of the Latter Day, asserting that it is the time when the True Law will spread far and wide. Nichikan (1665–1726), the twenty-sixth high priest of Taiseki-ji, says in his commentaries that there are two major points in this work: One, that the Mystic Law implicit in the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter of the Lotus Sutra shall spread without fail in the Latter Day, and two, that Nichiren Daishonin, the teacher of the Buddhism of Sowing, is the Buddha who enables all people of the Latter Day to attain Buddhahood.

This treatise begins with the statement, “When it comes to studying the teachings of Buddhism, one must first learn to understand the time” (WND, 538). While the concept of time in Buddhism will be discussed in greater detail later, “time” here indicates the time when a Buddha appears in this world to teach the Law that will lead people to enlightenment. The Daishonin explains elsewhere that there are five criteria to take into account in propagating Buddhism: 1) a correct understanding of the teaching; 2) a correct understanding of the people’s capacity (i.e., what teaching will enable them to attain Buddhahood); 3) a correct understanding of the time, 4) a correct understanding of the nature of the country; and 5) a correct understanding of the sequence of propagation, that is, the teachings previously propagated in that country.

In this writing he explains the importance of understanding the time. He traces the propagation of Buddhism, mentioning how great scholars and sages, inheriting the teachings of Shakyamuni, propagated the Buddhism that befitted their times. In the first 500-year period after Shakyamuni’s passing or the first half of the Former Day of the Law, the Buddha’s disciples such as Kashyapa and Ananda propagated the teachings of monastic Buddhism. During the second 500-year period or the latter half of the Former Day of the Law, the Buddhist teachers

such as Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu propagated the teachings of altruistic Mahayana Buddhism. During the Middle Day of the Law, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai systematized the theoretical teachings of the Lotus Sutra in China, and Dengyo brought them to Japan. (For more discussions on the concept of “the three periods” and the dating of Shakyamuni’s death, please see “Nichiren Daishonin and the Three Periods of the Former, Middle and Latter Days of the Law,” *Living Buddhism*, January 2001, pp. 23–25.)

Scholars of the Daishonin’s time generally held that the Latter Day of the Law had begun in 1052 A.D. The Lotus Sutra speaks of it as a time when people’s lives would be clouded by illusion, and the Great Collection Sutra (Jpn *Daijukkyo*) states, “It will be an age of conflict, and the Pure Law will be lost.” The decadence and turmoil that marked the Buddhist world during the later Heian period (795–1158) in Japan seemed to lend credence to the sutra’s predictions. In the Kamakura period (1185–1333), natural disasters, social upheaval and the two invasion attempts on the part of the Mongols further strengthened people’s sense of foreboding that the terrible “degenerate age” was upon them. (For more discussion on the “Latter Day of the Law,” please see “The Latter Day of the Law: The End of the World or a New Dawn of Hope?” *Living Buddhism*, December 1999, pp. 6–7.)

“The Selection of the Time,” however, views the Latter Day as a time when the Mystic Law implicit in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra will spread throughout the world and benefit all people. It also identifies the Daishonin with Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who, according to the Lotus Sutra, will appear in the Latter Day of the Law and spread the sutra’s teaching. From the viewpoint of traditional Buddhism, the Latter Day is an evil age when Buddhism falls into decline. But from the standpoint of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, one could not choose a more fortunate time to be alive.

Commentary

In the secular texts it says, “A sage is one who fully understands those things that have not yet made their appearance.” And in the Buddhist texts it says, “A sage is one who knows the three existences of life—past, present, and future.”

Secular texts” here indicates non-Buddhist teachings such as Confucianism and Brahmanism, which regard a sage as one who foresees events in the future. Sages, according to some traditions, were thought able to hear voices from the heavens inaudible to ordinary people, and instruct people according to what they heard. These non-Buddhist teachings, however, were limited in enabling people to fathom the workings of the causal law and the eternity of life, because they tended to view the human being merely as an agent of an eternal, enlightened force in the universe rather than its embodiment.

Buddhism reveals the law of causality that permeates both time and space and gives rise to all activities of nature and the human being. Through a profound understanding of this universal principle, a sage, in Buddhism, saves people from suffering and guides them to happiness. In other words, a sage is another name for a Buddha.

Nichiren Daishonin thoroughly understood the law of causality as well as the eternal nature of life. Through his penetrating insight into the kinds of causes people were making in the depths of their lives, he was able to foresee the course that lay ahead not only for individuals but for society, and not only in the immediate circumstances, but into the future.

In “Letter from Sado,” therefore, the Daishonin states: “Although I, Nichiren, am not a sage, I am equal to one, for I uphold the Lotus Sutra exactly as it teaches. Furthermore, since I have long understood the ways of the world, the prophecies I have made in this life have all come true. Therefore, you must never doubt what I have told you concerning future existence” (WND, 302).

Throughout history, many religious leaders have made predictions about the future. How, then, is

Nichiren Daishonin different from these religious prophets and what is the significance of his predictions?

First, the Daishonin observed the present in light of the essential law of life and the universe, and then predicted future events on the basis of his clear insight of this law. Using the example of science, a person who becomes deeply aware of the laws of physics and mathematics that govern the movement of the cosmos can predict the positions of the planets at a given time in the future with relative ease. Armed with such knowledge, such an individual can confidently predict the occurrence of eclipses or other observable astronomical events. In the past, people



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A person who understands the laws of physics and mathematics that govern the movement of the cosmos can predict the positions of the planets. It may have been thought that such a person possessed supernatural powers or those of a fortune-teller. But it is in fact insight into the laws of nature that enables the future to be predicted in such a way.



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There are two categories of the three calamities: the three greater calamities of fire, water and wind, which destroy the world, and the three lesser calamities of high grain prices or inflation, warfare and pestilence, from which human society perishes.

may have thought such a person possessed supernatural powers, but it was in fact insight into a basic law of nature that enabled the future to be predicted in such a way. The Daishonin says in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” where he predicts the occurrence of internal strife and foreign invasion, “I have pondered the matter carefully with what limited resources I possess, and have looked a little at the scriptures for an answer” (WND, 7). In “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” he says, “We must conclude that the Lotus Sutra is the only bright mirror we should have, and that through it we can understand the heart of all the sutras” (WND, 692). From those passages, we can see that the Daishonin based his predictions on the teachings expounded in various Buddhist scriptures, especially the Lotus Sutra, which contains the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. His predictions did not come from any mysterious occult power or divine inspiration, but from his thorough grasp of the Buddhist wisdom that sheds light on the workings of life.

Second, the Daishonin did not make predictions

to gain fame or establish himself as a religious leader, but as a “votary of the Lotus Sutra” who was striving to spread the Buddhist wisdom for the sake of humankind. Predictions or prophecies are usually judged solely in terms of whether or not they are fulfilled. To understand the significance of the Daishonin’s prophecies, however, we must view them from the deeper perspective of their purpose, which was to awaken the people to the True Law so that they could establish peace and happiness. The Daishonin’s concern for the people found its expression in his valiant efforts at propagation and fearless remonstrations with the authorities. His compassion, in other words, gave rise to penetrating wisdom that allowed him to see the future.

The practice and understanding of the Daishonin’s Buddhism help us develop the wisdom to discern, in the present moment, the causes of future effects as well as the effects of past causes by observing the present reality. A passage from the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra (Jpn *Shinjikan gyo*) reads, “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (WND, 279). But this does not mean we can intellectually decipher the intricate web of causes and effects in minute detail. We may not be able to foretell everything that will happen in the future in the manner of a prophet. To understand the causal law in our lives, however, means to gain the wisdom to know what cause to make for our happiness.

As we deepen our faith in the Gohonzon and begin to develop the wisdom to perceive the law of cause and effect in our lives, we can accept our present circumstances and problems with more confidence — confidence that we can make causes now to change problems for the better. We come to realize that whatever effect we are experiencing in the present is the result of a cause that we ourselves made in the past, instead of blaming others for our difficulties. In this way, we naturally take full responsibility for our lives — in the sense that we clearly see our problems for what they are and find solutions within us.

Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge. The first time was ... when I presented my *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* ...

Nichikan explains in his commentary that the Daishonin's statement, "Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge," expresses his conviction as the foremost "sage" in the entire world. In other words, he is the Buddha to expound the Mystic Law in the Latter Day of the Law. Based on a thorough grasp of the Buddhist teachings and his profound understanding of the causal law, he made verbal predictions of the outbreak of internal strife and foreign invasion on three different occasions when he remonstrated with the authorities.

The first was when the Daishonin submitted his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" to Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent and the effective ruler of Japan at that time. On July 16, 1260, the Daishonin asked Yadoya Nyudo, a government official, to deliver the treatise with the message: "Please advise His Lordship that devotion to the Zen school and the Nembutsu school should be abandoned. If this advice is not heeded, trouble will break out within the ruling clan, and the nation will be attacked by another country."

Internal strife and foreign invasion are among the "three calamities and seven disasters" described in various sutras. The three calamities occur at the end of a *kalpa* (according to ancient Indian tradition, an extremely long period of time). There are two categories of the three calamities: the three greater calamities of fire, water and wind, which destroy the world, and the three lesser calamities of high grain prices or inflation (especially caused by famine), warfare and pestilence, from which human society perishes. The seven disasters include war and natural disasters, and are generally held to arise as a result of slandering the true teaching of Buddhism. They are mentioned in the Medicine Master Sutra (Jpn *Yakushi kyo*), the Benevolent Kings Sutra (Jpn *Ninno kyo*) and other sutras and differ slightly according to the source.

After studying the Medicine Master, Great

Collection, Golden Light (Jpn *Konkomyo kyo*) and Benevolent Kings sutras, the Daishonin concluded that of these various disasters and calamities, two — internal strife and foreign invasion — had yet to occur. In "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," the Daishonin states: "Because, of the seven types of disasters described in the Medicine Master Sutra, five have already occurred. Only two have yet to appear, the calamity of invasion from foreign lands and the calamity of revolt within one's own domain" (WND, 24).

Although the Daishonin had already stated his predictions in "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," he conveyed these especially important points verbally so that when Hojo Tokiyori read it he could keep them in mind.

The second time was ... when I said to Hei no Saemon-no-jo: "Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan. Doing away with me is toppling the pillar of Japan!"

In January 1268, an envoy from Kublai Khan arrived in Kamakura with a message demanding that Japan declare its loyalty to the Mongol Empire. The envoy was sent back empty-handed, and the government began to prepare for war. Nichiren Daishonin then wrote "The Rationale for Writing 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land'" (WND, 161–64) and sent it to the little-known Hogan, a priest who appears to have been active in government circles. In this letter the Daishonin explains the circumstances leading to his writing of "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," and points out that the arrival of the Mongol emissary has substantiated the prophecy of foreign invasion made in that treatise.

In October, he sent letters to eleven high-ranking political and religious leaders, including Hojo Tokimune and the priests Doryu of Kencho-ji temple and Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple, pointing out that the predictions in his treatise were now being fulfilled and demanding the opportunity to demonstrate the validity of his teachings in public religious debate. However, his appeal fell on deaf ears.



Buddhism elucidates the connection between environmental disasters and the inner realm of human life.

In “The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra,” the Daishonin describes the situation as follows:

“In actuality, however, priests of the other schools cursed and deceived my messengers. The government officials ignored or refused to reply to my letters, and even when they did reply, they deliberately neglected to report the content of my letters to the regent. Their behavior was highly irregular. ... I risked my reputation and life to remonstrate with the authorities. But just as a high wind creates high waves or a powerful dragon brings forth torrential rains, so my admonitions called forth increasing animosity. The regent’s supreme council met to discuss whether to behead me or banish me from Kamakura, and whether to confiscate the estates of or execute my disciples and lay supporters, or to imprison or exile them to distant places” (WND, 764).

Earlier in 1271, Japan had suffered a prolonged drought and the government ordered the priest Ryokan to pray for rain. The Daishonin challenged him, saying that if Ryokan’s prayers could produce

rain in seven days he would become Ryokan’s disciple, but that if his prayers failed, Ryokan should embrace the Lotus Sutra.

Ryokan gladly agreed and began his prayer ritual, but instead of rain, damaging and persistent gales arose. Humiliated, he refused to keep his promise and instead began using his influence among the wives and widows of top government officials to spread rumors about the Daishonin. As a result, Nichiren Daishonin was summoned for interrogation at the hands of the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, Hei no Saemon, on September 10, 1271.

The Daishonin took this opportunity to remonstrate with Hei no Saemon, predicting the outbreak of internal strife and foreign invasion if the government punished him unlawfully. He warned Hei no Saemon:

“If you ignore this advice and punish me unreasonably...the entire country will have cause to regret your decision. If you condemn me, you will be rejecting the Buddha’s envoy...there will occur what is called the calamity of internal strife, rebellion within the ruling clan. This will be followed by the calamity of foreign invasion, attack from all sides, particularly from the west” (WND, 765).

The Daishonin describes Hei no Saemon’s response, saying, “Hearing this, the magistrate Hei no Saemon, forgetting all the dignity of his rank, became wild with rage...” (WND, 765).

Hei no Saemon, having no justification for deciding upon the Daishonin’s sentence himself, let the Daishonin go. Two days later, on September 12, the Daishonin sent Hei no Saemon a letter called “On the Day before Yesterday” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 183) to remonstrate with the government again. But by that afternoon, official policy toward the Daishonin had been decided, and Hei no Saemon and several hundred warriors rode to the Daishonin’s dwelling at Matsubagayatsu and arrested him. Soldiers vandalized the Daishonin’s small hut.

But the Daishonin confidently declared to Hei no Saemon: “Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan. Doing away with me is toppling the pillar of Japan! Immediately you will all face ‘the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain,’ or strife among yourselves, and also ‘the calamity of invasion from foreign lands’”

(WND, 579). This is the second time that the Daishonin refers to himself as one who “gained distinction by having such knowledge” (WND, 579). On that night, the Daishonin knelt before the executioner’s sword.

In the paragraph above, Nichiren Daishonin says, “All the Nembutsu and Zen temples...should be burned to the ground, and their priests taken to Yui Beach to have their heads cut off” (WND, 579). The Daishonin’s seemingly violent, intolerant statement regarding the prominent Buddhist sects of his day is purely a rhetorical device to impress Hei no Saemon with the gravity of the offense of slandering the Lotus Sutra.

In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin explains the meaning of the Nirvana Sutra that describes the killing of slanderous monks. The Daishonin writes:

“My only hatred is for the act of slandering the Law. According to the Buddhist teachings, prior to Shakyamuni slanderous monks would have incurred the death penalty. But since the time of Shakyamuni, the One Who Can Endure, the giving of alms to slanderous monks is forbidden in the sutras teachings. Now if all the four kinds of Buddhists within the four seas and the ten thousand lands would only cease giving alms to wicked priests and instead all come over to the side of the good, then how could any more troubles rise to plague us, or disasters come to confront us?” (WND, 23)

As he clearly explains in this passage, the Daishonin’s prime focus is on clarifying people’s attachment to misleading teachings so that they may establish a correct understanding of life. So long as people support a corrupt religious authority, financially or otherwise, with good intent or out of ignorance, they not only remain blind to the supreme truth of Buddhahood, but also commit the same offence of destroying Buddhism from within.

Nichikan explains the symbolic meaning behind the Daishonin’s reference to the cessation of alms-giving to evil priests and their beheading in terms of the four ways of teaching (Jpn *shishitsudan*), which is expounded in Nagarjuna’s *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (Jpn *Daichido ron*). According to Nichikan, to prevent slanderous priests from receiving alms means to teach according to an individual’s capac-

ity, thus enabling that person to increase any good karma accumulated in past existences. The admonition to behead slanderous priests is meant to awaken people from their illusions so they can free themselves from the three poisons: greed, anger and foolishness (WND, 1277). This involves teaching those caught up in greed to recognize the impurity of their attachment, those dominated by anger to practice compassionate acts and those blinded by the poison of foolishness to perceive the causal law. In light of the Daishonin’s own explanation and of Nichikan’s interpretation, it becomes clear that withdrawing support for corrupt priests is the active process of self-awakening and self-purification that has not only an immediate financial impact on the corruption of the priesthood, but also a significant influence on what matters most — our own happiness.

The third time was ... when I said to Saemon-no-jo: “Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler’s domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart.”

On March 8, 1274, a government envoy arrived at Sado Island with a pardon for the Daishonin. No reasons were given for the government’s action, but it appears in retrospect that officials were concerned about the arrival of a Mongol emissary and the abortive coup of Hojo Tokisuke — events which seemed to bear out the Daishonin’s earlier predictions.

On April 8, Hei no Saemon requested an interview with the Daishonin. This time the atmosphere was courteous. The government even offered to build him a temple and to place his school of Buddhism on an equal footing with all other schools. But the Daishonin refused. “Since I have been born in the ruler’s domain, I must follow him in my action. But I need not follow him in the belief of my heart,” he declared.

In this passage, the Daishonin displays the strength and nobility of spiritual freedom and independence. He stood undaunted against those in power who sought to use religion to further their own ends by threatening persecution or coaxing with sweet words. While most religious leaders of his day succumbed to



One of Nichiren Daishonin's predictions was foreign invasion. The Mongols struck Japan in massive numbers in October 1274. The invading force included six thousand mariners aboard three hundred warships, three hundred swift boats and three hundred water supply vessels.

persecutions or relinquished their spiritual independence in return for protection from the authorities, the Daishonin stood firm for spiritual freedom, which is essential to happiness. Here the Daishonin demonstrates people's ability to be free even while under physical restriction. In his action we can clearly see that true freedom is not the ability to do anything that pleases us. If we seek only selfish pleasures while ignoring others' suffering, we will become enslaved to our own desires rather than being free. On the other hand, even if our circumstances seem to restrict us — financially, materially or health-wise — as long as we have the determination to take faith in the supreme truth of our innate Buddhahood, we can enjoy freedom. Freedom, the Daishonin teaches us here, is not a matter of our circumstances, but of our choice.

During the interview, Hei no Saemon asked Nichiren Daishonin when he thought the Mongols would attack Japan and if it were possible to attain enlightenment through any of the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin replied to each of his questions by quoting relevant passages from the sutras, and he predicted that the Mongols would strike within the year. Six months later, his prediction was born out. This was the third of his “three important pronouncements” (WND, 579).

Nichiren Daishonin calls these three occasions the “three important pronouncements” because his predictions were completely fulfilled. One hundred days after the Daishonin's exile to Sado Island, Hojo Tokisuke was killed for plotting a revolt against his younger brother Tokimune. Tokimune succeeded his father Tokiyori as the head of the Hojo clan and became the regent or military ruler — the Daishonin's prediction of internal strife had indeed materialized.

Regarding the prediction of foreign invasion, the Mongols struck in massive numbers in October 1274, three years after the Sado exile. Their ranks included fifteen thousand Mongolians and Chinese, five thousand Koreans

and five thousand colonials from subjugated lands. The invading force also included six thousand mariners aboard three hundred warships, three hundred swift boats and three hundred water supply vessels, all constructed by the Koreans on the order of Kublai Khan.

The odds overwhelmingly favored the Mongol force, whose close-order tactics and use of gunpowder rendered the Japanese warriors, with their bows and arrows and reliance on hand-to-hand combat, almost defenseless. At first, the Japanese losses were staggering, and the Mongols seemed unstoppable. The would-be conquerors swept through the islands of Tsushima and Iki, and by the middle of the month were pressing their attack in Kyushu, the southernmost island of the Japanese archipelago.

The main part of the invading force struck at the port city of Hakata, the first and only barrier to Kyushu's political center at Dazaifu. When things looked bleakest, however, a sudden storm sank more than 200 of the Mongols' battleships. Staggered by their losses, the invaders withdrew to Korea.

In May 1281, seven years after the first invasion attempt, the Mongols launched a second attack. The islands of Tsushima and Iki were occupied again, and a Mongol army of fourteen thousand soldiers

attacked Hakata for the second time. Once again, however, most of the fleet was sunk by a typhoon and the forces withdrew.

As for Hei no Saemon, he twice received the Daishonin's remonstrations as previously mentioned. But he did not listen to the advice and continued to persecute the Daishonin and his disciples. In September 1279, Hei no Saemon arrested twenty farmers of the Atsuhara area who had become followers of the Daishonin. Based on false charges he imprisoned them at his estate. Later he had three brothers (Jinshiro, Yagoro and Yarokuro) beheaded, and banished the rest.

In 1284, when Hojo Sadatoki became regent, Hei no Saemon became steward to the main family of the Hojo clan. He arranged the death of Akita Jonosuke, who sat on the Regent's Council, thus seizing the reins of government for himself. His influence at one point seemed to surpass even that of the regent. But in 1293, fourteen years after the Atsuhara persecution, he and his son Sukemune were beheaded by Regent Hojo Sadatoki for their alleged revolt against the government. The execution took place at Hei no Saemon's own estate, where he beheaded the three farmers from Atsuhara. His eldest son Munetsuna, who informed the government of his father's plot, was exiled to Sado Island.

Yet it was not I, Nichiren, who made these three important pronouncements. Rather it was in all cases the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni that had entered into my body.

This paragraph indicates Nichiren Daishonin's sublime state of life as a person fully awakened to his innate Buddhahood, which is symbolized as "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni." By saying "Yet it was not I, Nichiren, who made these three important pronouncements..." the Daishonin declares that he did not make the predictions as a deluded man, but as one awakened to "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni" within his own life.

Nichikan interprets "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni" as the eternal Buddha of limitless



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Though each of us is "like a single drop of water," our individual happiness is the building block for a peaceful society.

joy, or the original Buddha. Also called the Buddha of absolute freedom, this indicates a person who derives limitless joy from the Mystic Law.

The Daishonin here sets an example for all of us. We too have "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni" deep within our lives. To understand the Daishonin's identity as the eternal Buddha of limitless joy is not to view him as a transcendental being removed from our mundane reality. Rather, it is to see that our lives are eternally endowed with the very same quality, to see that our lives are worthy of infinite respect as we struggle in our mundane reality.

In this passage, the Daishonin seems to separate his physical or earthly existence ("I, Nichiren") from his enlightenment to his supreme inner dignity ("the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni"), but the crux of the passage lies in the fact that the Daishonin was aware that the core of his life was Buddhahood. Furthermore, the Daishonin was able to tap into this potential and make concrete changes in the way he lived—specifically in this case, making the "three important pronouncements" in his attempt to steer the Japanese society from the course of self-destruction. As the Daishonin writes, "Through the example of one person, all living beings become equal" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 564). Through his own example, he attempted to help all people become aware of the same potential they possess. By doing so, he was following the teaching of the

Lotus Sutra, in which Shakyamuni says, “Shariputra, you should know / that at the start I took a vow, / hoping to make all persons / equal to me, without any distinction between us” (“Expedient Means,” Chapter 2, *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, p. 36).

This is the all-important doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life taught in the Lotus Sutra.... “Appearance,” the first of the ten factors of life, is the most important of them all; this is why the Buddha appeared in the world.

At the beginning of this paragraph, the Daishonin says, “This is the all-important doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.” The sentence shows that Nichiren Daishonin embodied the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life or the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is called the oneness of the Person and the Law.

Because Nichiren Daishonin manifested the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as an ordinary person, his life became the embodiment of the supreme Buddhist truth. Based on his profound insight into the workings of life, the Daishonin became aware of what awaited the nation of Japan as a whole. In this sense, he made his predictions to dispel people’s illusion and doubt about their true potential. The basis of the Daishonin’s behavior was always his profound compassion for the people. And his wisdom was the expression of his compassion.

The rest of this passage may be interpreted in many ways. According to Nichikan’s commentary, “appearance” refers to the emergence of the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching, also called the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. They are the bodhisattvas in the Lotus Sutra whom Shakyamuni entrusts with the mission of propagating the sutra after his passing.

They are described in the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In this chapter, countless bodhisattvas from other worlds ask for permission to propagate the Lotus Sutra in this world after the Buddha’s death, but Shakyamuni refuses, saying that this world already has bodhisattvas who

will carry out this task. Then the earth trembles and a host of magnificent bodhisattvas emerge, each with his or her own retinue of followers.

Nichikan also interprets “appearance” as an omen and considers the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as the sign that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread throughout the world in the Latter Day. Regarding this point, the Daishonin says: “Thus the six auspicious happenings described in the ‘Introduction’ chapter of the Lotus Sutra are great omens exceeding in magnitude any other major signs appearing in the entire life of Shakyamuni Buddha. And the omens described in the ‘Emerging from the Earth’ chapter are immeasurably greater in magnitude than these” (WND, 440).

While the other bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching fail to understand the significance of the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, Shakyamuni in the Lotus Sutra is able to see its meaning. This is why the Daishonin states at the end of the paragraph, “Wise men can see omens and what they foretell...” As Shakyamuni foretells in the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin appeared many centuries after Shakyamuni’s death and began to spread the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contained in the sutra.

Little streams come together to form the great ocean, and tiny particles of dust accumulate to form Mount Sumeru. ... Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood!

Little streams come together to form the great ocean, and tiny particles of dust accumulate to form Mount Sumeru.” We can interpret this passage as emphasizing the importance of focusing on individuals in our Buddhist movement for peace rather than the masses. The real happiness of each person is a building block for a peaceful society and is of the utmost importance.

While this is easy to say, it is difficult to realize, especially when the happiness of one person seems to conflict with the convenience and advantage of others. So many wars have been fought to protect the interests of nations at the sacrifice of the happiness of the common people. Many religions, as they have

spread and developed, tend to protect structure, authority and dogma before individuals. Through this passage, however, we can see that in the Daishonin's Buddhism, the happiness of each person is in itself the goal; everything else is simply a means to support this goal.

Next Nichiren Daishonin describes his existence, saying, "I was like a single drop of water or a single particle of dust..." Here the Daishonin seems to encourage us to reverse our conventional thinking process. We tend to think that people's individual influences are small (or even meaningless) and that only when they are accumulated do they begin to have any influence on society. But the Daishonin points out that within his seemingly insignificant existence ("a single drop of water" or "a single particle of dust") exists the realization of a peaceful society ("a Mount Sumeru of perfect enlightenment" or "an ocean of great nirvana"). Here the Daishonin celebrates the immense power of one awakened person.

By saying that vast numbers of people will come to recite the Lotus Sutra and transmit it to others, the Daishonin encourages us to exert our utmost in practice for ourselves ("recite the Lotus Sutra") and for others ("transmit it to others"). The Daishonin goes on to say, "Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood!" Sometimes it is difficult to discern exactly what leads us to happiness in our lives. Searching for happiness, people often try changing their external circumstances—a new job or relationship—thinking that something else or someone else will make them happy. The Daishonin makes it clear that the only way to genuine happiness, here described as Buddhahood, lies in our inconspicuous yet steady effort to polish our humanity while working for the happiness of others. The happiness we build in this way emanates from within — not because of our external circumstances, but because of how we see ourselves and how we treat others.

Taking the Daishonin's courageous spirit and humanistic action as our guide, we strive sincerely to recite the sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, to develop our inner state. This constitutes practice for oneself. When we communicate the benefit and joy of our Buddhist practice to others



Michael S. Yamashita/CORBIS

Sometimes it is difficult to discern exactly what leads us to happiness in our lives. Searching for happiness, people often try changing their external circumstances. The Daishonin states, "Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood!" other than practicing for ourselves and for others.

through our sincere words and behavior, we are practicing for others. Nichiren Daishonin reaffirms that when we do this, we are traveling along the correct path toward supreme happiness or the attainment of Buddhahood. The important thing is to have strong confidence in this, and continue through the ups and downs of life to advance for the sake of our own and others' happiness. As the Daishonin points out throughout this thesis, the time to transform our society into "an ocean of great nirvana" is now, and to seize this time and become the all-encompassing "single drop of water" ourselves is to understand the meaning of "The Selection of the Time." ❁

By the SGI-USA Study Department

1. Yadoya Mitsunori (n.d.) was an official of the Kamakura government. He is said to have been one of the seven individuals permitted access to the lay priest of Saimyo-ji, Hojo Tokiyori, when the latter was on his deathbed.
2. *Lotus Sutra*, chap. 2.



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REVIVING EDUCATION: *The Brilliance of the Inner Spirit—*

BY SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA

Further Thoughts on Education in the Twenty-first Century

Daيسaku 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.



SGI President Ikeda, the founder of the Soka school system, talks to students at the first athletic meeting of Tokyo Soka Elementary School in 1978.

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.

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 inci-



Shelby Press

SGI President Ikeda conducts a dialogue with Norman Cousins in February 1987. Cousins often warned against the dangers of indifference and cynicism in the face of evil because these attitudes show a lack of passionate engagement in life.

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 common-sense 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

dents 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.

Page numbers refer to the list of works consulted at the end of the article.

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

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 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



Unless we squarely face the reality of bullying, efforts to end it will fall short of reaching children's hearts. Courage is needed if we are to end violence in schools.

Reflections
Photolibrary/CORBIS

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 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 undeni-

able 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 con-

tent 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 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



The State Russian Museum/CORBIS

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky was sentenced to four years of hard labor in Siberia for allegedly harboring revolutionary ideas. That experience shaped how he viewed the common virtues of humankind.

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 communi-



Gregory Nakasoji

Minuteman Hall at Soka University of America, Calabasas was established in 1987 and was the first step in Soka education in the United States.

cate, 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 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 non-violent 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

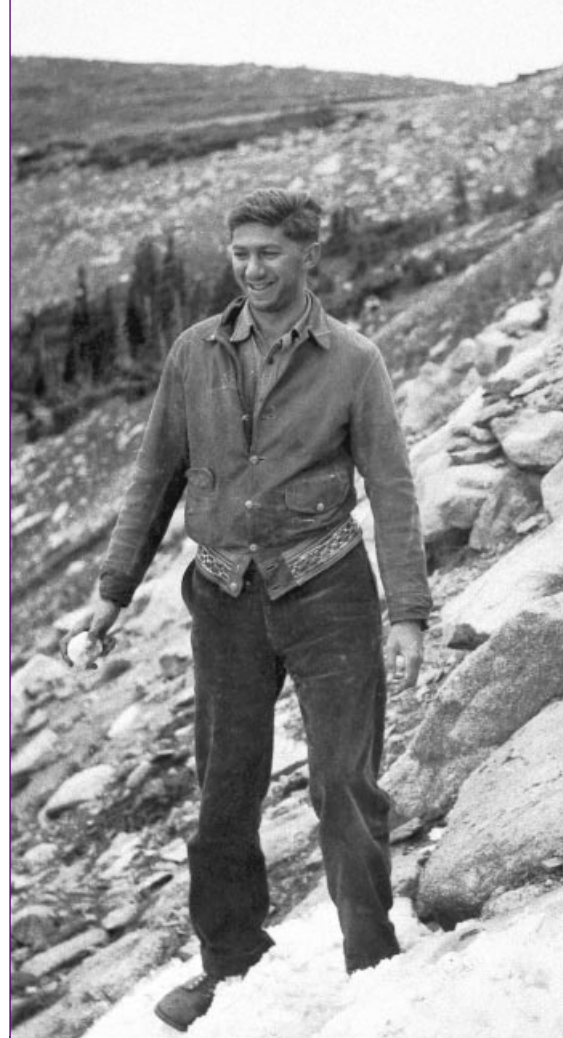
and the community.

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. 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



Ann Kaplan/CORBIS

American psychologist Abraham H. Maslow offered his insight that 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.”

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,



Craig Lovell/CORBIS

"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."

Tsuneshaburo 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 addi-

tion, 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 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 senti-

ment would be reduced to sectarianism; religion would degenerate into something anti-humanistic 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 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).

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 engage-

ment, 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 spiritual-



World literature is a treasure house of questions, of reflection and wonderment. One such example is Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Above, Tolstoy is pictured writing.

The State Russian Museum/CORBIS

ity 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.

What I regard as the climactic



Kirk Comyles

It can be an enriching experience when parents and teachers read aloud to children.

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

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.

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 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 suf-



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. The Victory Over Violence program, sponsored by the SGI-USA youth, is one such initiative that supports the end of all types of violence.

John Brooks

fering 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.

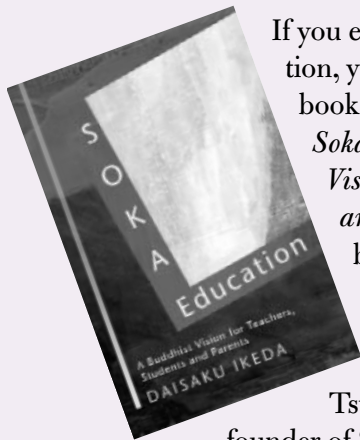
According to a study of school records, absenteeism or refusal to attend school now accounts for seventy percent of the cases brought to the Educational Counseling Program. In almost half of these cases, fear of bullying is the reason children feel unable or unwilling to go to school.

In the face of these realities, we cannot remain idle. Our whole society must show a greater con-

cern 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

New Book on Soka Education



If you enjoyed this essay on education, you'll enjoy even more a new book from Middleway Press, *Soka Education: A Buddhist Vision for Teachers, Students and Parents*. This book brings together SGI President Ikeda's major essays and speeches on education and the life of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the founder of Soka education.

In this book, President Ikeda shares his thoughts on topics such as the role of education in creating a peaceful world, the meaning of a "creative life," the crucial role of the teacher, and the respon-

sibility of the student to the creation of values. Teachers, students and parents will gain a fresh spiritual perspective from which to view the ultimate purpose of education itself.

"Mr. Ikeda provides teachings that will enrich the work of educators everywhere," writes Victor Kazanjian, dean of Religious and Spiritual Life at Wellesley College, in his foreword. "Drawing from the writings of philosophers and poets from all ages and places, Mr. Ikeda breathes new life into the ancient vision of education as the primary force for human liberation by applying these teachings to a contemporary context."

Soka Education will be available this summer at your favorite neighborhood bookseller or on-line at www.middlewaypress.com.

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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Educators *IN ACTION*

“It is people who will pave the way toward the future of our world, and there is no greater influence in the development of an individual than that of solid, human-centered education.”

– Daisaku Ikeda
Peking University, 1990

In his recent education proposal, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda calls on each of us to establish the twenty-first century as the century of education. Committed to the lifelong happiness of their students, SGI-USA members Joe Newman, Melanie Reiser, Jennifer Obidah and Monte Joffee have made humanistic education their life’s pursuit and are determined to make a difference.

IN ACTION

EDUCATION: STRIVING TO HELP CHILDREN EXPERIENCE THEIR GIFTS

BY JOE NEWMAN, VENICE, CALIFORNIA

As a child I was diagnosed as hyperactive (Attention Deficit Disorder) and was put on the drug Ritalin when I was in the second grade. This diagnosis and my early education experiences would have a profound impact on my self-image and my personal sense of mission within education. I left school feeling as though I was lacking in the character traits needed for self-discipline, concentration and success.

I began practicing Buddhism when I was nineteen and it was only after about eight years of practice that I began to understand the Buddhist concept that “attaining enlightenment as you are” applied to me. After leaving school and working in society, many of my best abilities became apparent to me. I began to realize that many of the



Gregory Nakasuji

Joe Newman awoke to his mission in life to “find a way to help children experience their gifts before they leave school.” Joe is a K-6 educator at The Endeavor School.

qualities that had been described as my “disorder” were actually powerful tools in the world outside of school.

It took eight years of Buddhist practice and a wide variety of work experiences for me to begin to see that I had left school feeling truly disordered and deficient. In truth, I was a capable and gifted individual. I also realized that there must be millions of children who were having similar experiences in school. It was at this moment that I awoke to my life mission. Somehow I had to find a way to reach these children and help them experience their gifts before they left school.

For the past ten years I have worked in a variety of schools and programs, the majority of which focused on children who were labeled as “learning disordered,” “behavioral problems” or both. It is no coincidence that those students who have been diagnosed as learning disordered often also exhibit behavior problems. For children labeled “learning disordered,” school is not a place where their gifts are emphasized but rather their deficits. Imagine renowned ballet dancer Mikhail Barishnikov arriving to a ballet company and being put to work everyday in the accounting department.

Based on my personal and teaching experiences I have been particularly attracted to certain principles of Soka education, first of which is its emphasis on involving the entire society in education. Makiguchi’s proposal

that the Japanese school day be cut in half and children spend the other half of the day working in apprenticeship roles within the community I believe had three distinct purposes. First, it would help to develop the relationships of the student beyond academia and into a broader community. Second, the experiences within the community would bring context and meaning to the academic subjects studied in school. Third, through these varied experiences and relationships, a child would be able to find his or her unique gifts and particular talents within the world.

I feel that school should be a place where children can experience myriad activities and opportunities to be found in the real world. To this end, when I teach I include activities that I call endeavors. These are activities of the adult world in miniature such as creating and running a small business, making a movie or designing a house. During the endeavor I try to draw as many links as possible with individuals that do these same things in the world around them. It is my hope that by including endeavors that represent all the intelligence found within society, I will enable each child to discover his or her particular gifts.

The second area of Soka education that I find particularly attractive is the importance it places on the relationship between teacher and student. The most dynamic aspect of teaching for me is the ever-

changing internal dialogue that I experience as I interact with my students. Perhaps it’s because of the numerous experiences that I’ve had with children considered difficult to effectively communicate with that this has always been so important. For me there are two areas that a teacher must always consider when interacting with children: the respect you give the children, and the respect the children give you.

It is easy to go into most schools and find teachers who err on one side or the other. It is my belief that these two are actually interdependent. That is to say that to achieve the maximum of either, you must be strong in both. Some teachers in the name of humanism fail to set clear consistent boundaries for the students and are excessively permissive, while others set strong authoritarian boundaries without helping the children to develop a sense of their own autonomy. I am always striving to create strict respectful boundaries with my students and to emphasize their choices and my high expectation of them. Also I’m trying to administer the consequence without judgment but rather as the natural effect of their choice.

In order to continually develop loving respectful relationships with my students, I continually wrestle with my inner self, asking whether the interaction was based on my higher ego speaking to their higher ego or from somewhere else.

IN ACTION

TAKING MY FIRST STEPS AS AN EDUCATOR

BY MELANIE REISER, FERNDALE, MICHIGAN

My dream is to work at a Soka elementary school in the United States, a dream that developed in 1996, after the first year and a half of my Buddhist practice. At the time I was working as a computer programmer, but was very unhappy, so I began to chant about what I really wanted to do. For a time in college, I had considered getting my teaching certificate for elementary education, but among other considerations I felt I wouldn't make enough money to support myself.

In June 1996 in his speech at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, SGI President Ikeda said: "The first condition for happiness is fulfillment. To be filled each day with a rewarding sense of exhilaration and purpose, a sense of tasks accomplished and deep fulfillment — people who feel this way are happy."

This really struck me, because that's not how I felt. That's when I really started pursuing my desire to teach.

During the summer of 1996 things fell into place in an amazing way. The person who introduced me to Buddhism told me about an

alternative school, called Waldorf, and I found they had a program to certify teachers in this method here in Michigan.

I started going to school right away and loved it. I found Waldorf to be based on humanistic values and consistent with Buddhism in many ways. One of the unique aspects of Waldorf education is that the teacher and the class stay together for eight years. Also, teachers home-visit the students the summer before grade one and part of their responsibility is to create a community, not just with the students but with the parents. Teachers introduce content through stories, which is just what President Ikeda does with *The Human Revolution* and *The New Human Revolution*. The curriculum is meant to address the experiences of the children at each age and all aspects of the children. Their physical, social, emotional, artistic and academic abilities are nurtured. As my education continued



Joann Ingoglia

"I never realized the patience, wisdom and high life-condition required to teach a group of first graders," says Melanie Reiser. She teaches at The Detroit Waldorf School.

over the next four years, I became more and more excited about my career move into education.

Then I began my first year of teaching. What a reality-check this year has been! Care for students and human revolution is what it's all about! Not that I am throwing out the importance of having well-established methods and a concrete curriculum, but I never realized the patience, wisdom and high life-condition required to teach a group of first graders. I have had

many eye-opening experiences — children running and jumping on desks, biting, scratching and hitting. In the heat of the moment, all I wanted was quiet and I can't say I've always responded with grace or respect for the children in the forefront of my mind. There were times I wanted to quit and ask the children to leave the school. But each day I went home and chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the determination, "I will win today." My first school year has ended and I'm still reeling from the experience.

Where does that leave me now? I still have the dream to work at a Soka elementary school in the United States; this is what helped me get through each day. What will it look like, when will it be established? I don't know. I keep trying to soak in as much as I can from President Ikeda's insights into education. I was very encouraged by his proposal on education (published in the February 2001 *Living Buddhism*) and the kind of reforms he suggested. I don't know how I am going to do it, but I want to show my appreciation for President Ikeda and respond to his passion for education. For my next step, I am determined to help raise the next generation of youth. As President Ikeda says, "We must give the highest priority to cultivating in young people the strength of character and values that will enable them to take the lead in building a world of creative coexistence" (*Living Buddhism*, February 2001, p.18).

IN ACTION

VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH: A CRITICAL LENS IN EXAMINING THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIETY

BY DR. JENNIFER E. OBIDAH, LOS ANGELES

Every morning I pray for the children all over the world who died during the night. For many young people today there is no greater challenge than violence. The 1994 *Children's Defense Fund State of America's Children Yearbook* noted that "more American children died from firearms on the killing fields of America than American soldiers died on the killing fields of Vietnam." Gun violence experienced by children — either as perpetrators or victims — is the type of violence cited most in media reports. However, children's experiences of abuse and neglect occur even more, or, as frequently as gun violence. Taken together, the many ways that children experience violence in their daily lives compel a reexamination of the role of education and educators in the lives of children.

My work on death and violence among the youth and the effects on public schooling began five years ago. As a middle school teacher I became aware that my students were frequently exposed

to violent deaths, and consequently this aspect of their realities had an effect on the educative process in my classroom. One particularly significant lesson for me was realizing that children who live with violence as an everyday reality are important sources of knowledge about the challenges of this issue in their lives. But in urban schools today many educators are afraid of the children they teach. Instead of focusing on their students' potential to learn, teachers are focusing more on students' potential to be violent. Consequently, they focus more on protecting themselves from their students.

There is no doubt that educators are faced with myriad challenges today, none the least of which is school violence. But as SGI President Ikeda asserts, and I concur, for educators to approach children with the mindset of a "self" lacking identification with the "other" [i.e., the students] is insensitive to the pain, anguish and suffering of the "other." He continues: "Viewed in this light, it is clear that none of us can remain a spectator or view the problem-

atic behavior of children as someone else's responsibility."

Today, as an educator preparing teachers to teach in urban schools and training doctoral students to become education researchers, I stress the importance of educators connecting with youth, and thereby effacing positions of "self" and "other" in the relationships between teachers and students, and researchers and those they research. I begin by debunking the myths that surround the topic of youth violence. First, violence among the youth is not new. Cycles of high rates of youth violence are evident when this phenomenon is analyzed historically. What is true however, is that children who commit acts of violence are children who feel alienated and have lost a sense of hope and belief in adults' ability to help. Second, reports of youth violence have nurtured a public indictment of all youth, and African American young men in particular. However, the fact is, as Dohrn (1997) notes, "if all the youth violence were eliminated, eighty-six percent of all violent crimes would still exist." Third, and as alluded to in President Ikeda's proposal, youth violence mirrors the anomie and chaos that prevails in this society. It does not occur in a vacuum.

So what can we as educators do? In his most recent education proposal, President Ikeda urges that a central goal of education, which is the aim of Soka schools,



Gregory Nakasuji

Dr. Jennifer E. Obidah focuses on youth and violence. "We must teach children care," she says, "by demonstrating care toward them even in the gravest situations." She is an assistant professor in the Urban Schooling Division of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, UCLA.

is to "develop students' abilities to ponder meaning and purpose...to foster a rich humanism and spirituality that enable students to enjoy personal growth and contribute to society" (see page 30). He asserts that for this to occur "every individual, every family, every organization and every sector of society must pool their energies and resources" (see page 30). Our responsibility as educators must center on the care of all children. We must teach children care by demonstrating care toward them even in the gravest situations. The need for more caring adults in the lives of children dealing with violence is imperative.

Consider all of the adults who enter the lives of "at-risk" children precisely because of their designation as "at-risk":

social workers, health care providers, probation officers, police officers, school psychologists and teachers. Six adults to one child in the absence of a parent or guardian, who, if present, would raise the number to seven or eight adults who ostensibly care for this child. If all of these adults viewed this child as their responsibility, how could this child remain "at-risk"? The necessity to pool our energies and resources is obvious. Our children's happiness does rest in the balance.

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As a principal in New York City, Monte Joffee believes that "school should be a happy place and learning should be meaningful, creative and interrelated." He would like to see more schools established that promote value-creating education.

IN ACTION

MY JOURNEY ON THE ROAD TO VALUE-CREATING EDUCATION

BY MONTE JOFFEE, NEW YORK

My experience on the highway of value-creating education started in 1969. The first

respected teacher in a South Bronx elementary school. Now highly committed to my students and to the concept of urban education, I was dismayed when the

phase of my career was centered purely on professional survival, as my entry into the profession was very rocky. My ideals about education were idealistic but theoretical and without the backing of a philosophy of life. Fortunately, I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism at the end of my first year of teaching, and through my practice as a youth, I fought through my weaknesses and learned to become determined, resilient and passionate. I bounced from job to job for four years until I gained the life force and confidence to succeed as a

South Bronx community was decimated by arson and neglect in the midst of New York's financial crisis of 1975.

When I was transferred into a small elementary school in Queens, I felt as if I was transported to the 1950s. The school's curriculum, administration, even the textbooks seemed no different from the school I attended as a boy. During this second phase of my career, I primarily dealt with establishing a vision of education.

At that time there was relatively limited information about Soka education. However, the contention of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi that the primary of function of schools is to promote the lifelong happiness of students resonated deeply with me. Yet with the exception of some wonderful early childhood teachers, few colleagues shared the conviction that school should be a happy place and that learning should be meaningful, creative and interrelated.

Despite my loneliness, I relied on my Buddhist practice to forge my spirit of hope and tried to become the best possible classroom teacher. Through my silent struggle I gained the respect of students, parents, administration and colleagues.

In my thirteenth year at the school I was offered a position as a music teacher, which enabled me to interact widely with students and colleagues. My classroom was the auditorium right at the center of the school and bub-

bles of laughter and creativity started to permeate the rather stodgy building. A year later, I had the opportunity to mentor three wonderful first-year teachers and the school had become more lively.

Through my wife's encouragement I started doctoral studies at Teachers College, Columbia University and discovered that the academic community was sparkling from a fresh wave of research that substantiated the extent to which professional collegiality and community-building affected student learning.

In 1991, the New York City Board of Education reached out to organizations and individuals in the city for original ideas for new schools. I helped organize a committee of fifteen friends to submit a proposal.

The committee was quite eclectic, with members from different ethnic groups, both teachers and parents, people spanning traditional and progressive pedagogical philosophies. Our proposal to create a K-12 school, centered on the notion of a caring community and dedicated to nurturing future leaders, was one of sixteen accepted by the Board out of nearly 300 applications.

We opened in 1993, and after many years of effort, have been consistently praised as one of the best public schools in New York City. I now realize how my previous struggles and efforts had prepared me for the role of school principal by helping me

forge a greater understanding of education and broadening my life-condition.

This third phase of my career is a study of the role of a school community can have on student learning. I have been fortunate to work with a highly talented and committed group of people who share a common vision about schooling. Our educational community has thrived because our human relationships are based on self-growth, trust and engagement. The stakeholders in the school engage in sustained and difficult dialogue, respect each other's unique talents and sense of initiative, and try to return to the prime point that our mission is to serve our students. As the "village elders" continue to grow, we see how our students start to accept responsibility, mellow and become more happy, capable and strong.

Issues of violence have largely diminished, we are currently studying the phenomenon of bullying, and we are trying to institutionalize the balanced values of rights, responsibilities and respect, which we call "R-cubed."

Maintaining our community has not been easy. We have encountered storms of cynicism and criticism, both from within and outside the school, and, on a couple of occasions, we almost lost our school. Yet our collective wisdom has always managed to surface at crucial moments in our development.

I am now asking myself several new questions. I see public education under intense attack from many politicians and the media, and university researchers seem currently unable to reach a consensus on the theoretical basis for the reconstruction of education.

As a result, I see dispirited teachers who have lost both self-confidence and a source of direction. I also see two other unsettling phenomena.

Stanley Pogrow has used the term *cognitive gap* to characterize the gaps of achievement between many students of color and their majority culture peers. Also, SGI President Ikeda has described the "flight from learning" which, in the eyes of many students, has transformed learning from the very gift and purpose of life to a meddlesome chore to be avoided if at all possible.

In the fourth phase of my career, I would like to see the establishment of schools that are beacons of hope to despairing students, parents and educators. I also sense there are pathways out of the cognitive gap and the flight from learning and I want to contribute to the map that contains the escape routes. Daisaku Ikeda encourages us that "the darker the night, the closer the dawn," and I sense that the current winds of gloom and criticism in the educational environment can be replaced by a brilliant dawn of value-creating education. ☸



Sarkyo Press

SGI President Ikeda thanks Captain Jay Marion for the baseball cap and praises his sound judgement and skills as a pilot. While flying from Denver to New York, due to dangerous weather conditions, Captain Marion made an emergency landing at Indianapolis Airport to prevent an accident.

Unforgettable

FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA

In this series, SGI President Ikeda has recorded his impressions of the many friends he has made in his travels for peace. In his New Year's poem in the January issue, he states: "I will continue to knock on the doors / Of diverse

cultures and civilizations, / Seeking out the humanity that is vibrantly alive / At the heart of each, / Believing that sincere dialogue/In search of our shared humanity / Will build a rainbow bridge linking the world."

Billy Jay Marion — Dedicated Airline Pilot

Last year [1996], during my visit to the United States, I was flying from Denver to New York, a 1,600-mile journey that cuts across the North American continent. From the air over Denver, I bade farewell to the

sheer cliffs of the Rocky Mountains. The flight was uneventful at the start. Then, suddenly, it began to rain in torrents. Outside the window it was pitch-black. We were engulfed in heavy clouds and the plane had to slice its way through sheets of rain.



Bill Ross/Corbis

Denver in the morning. The SGI president received his first honorary doctorate in the United States from the University of Denver in June 1996.

After a brief announcement, the plane began to descend. We landed at Indianapolis Airport, about two-thirds of the way to our final destination. The rain was still falling hard and we could hear thunder rumbling in the distance. Captain Marion explained why we were making a layover: bad weather in New York was delaying air traffic. "If we were to arrive at our scheduled time," he said, "we would find ourselves circling the field until the backlog of waiting flights had been cleared. I am concerned that we might not have enough fuel. Though I am fairly certain we would be all right, I don't want to take even the slightest chance and expose you to risk, so I decided to land here and refuel."

He chose the way of absolute safety. Here, I thought, is a great pilot. In the field of aviation, they say that a great pilot is not someone who can escape from the most dangerous situation, but someone who takes care to ensure that he or she is never in danger in the first place. When asked if he had ever been in a life-threatening situation in the air, Captain Marion

replied, "No. I have never been in a situation in which I thought there was a possibility I might die." And when one inquired as to what he thought was the reason for plane accidents, he said, "Human error. Sometimes a pilot makes an error in judgment, and there are other mistakes as well. The human factor is crucial. You can't blame accidents on the weather."

Statistics in fact show that eighty percent of all aviation accidents are caused by human error: Important details overlooked, failure to communicate, overconfidence in technology, problems in human relations, and the simple assumption that since everything has been okay doing things this way up to now, it will always continue to be so. An instant's carelessness can have disastrous consequences. The smallest lapses can result in the most tragic accidents. Every detail is important in flying. For example, the plane's wings can lose five percent of their lift simply because the front edges have accumulated as little as a quarter of an inch of ice. In a pinch, that five percent can mean the difference



Nik Wheeler/Corbis

Good pilots take every precaution to prevent accidents and ensure the safe landing of all their passengers. "The pilot and copilot don't even eat the same food on the plane, just in case one of them gets food poisoning."

between life and death.

In addition, no matter how carefully a plane is checked and serviced, the possibility of malfunction can never be completely eliminated. Good pilots have to think of everything, including every possible random occurrence — and think about them with tenfold seriousness. Once the plane has taken off, there is only one acceptable result for them: the safe landing of all their passengers. If you fail in a life-and-death struggle, any excuses are meaningless. The pilot and the copilot don't even eat the same food on the plane, just in case one of them gets food poisoning. The cockpit, despite being equipped today with sophisticated autopilot tech-



George Hall/Corbis

nology, remains a very human place.

Captain Marion was born, he says, "in a poor farming family" in North Carolina. Though a pilot is a very elite profession, he confesses: "Actually, I never graduated from flight school. I learned a lot on my own." Before becoming a pilot, he worked in a local tobacco processing plant. One day, a coworker announced that he was going to become a pilot, which would, of course, be very difficult. Still, that coworker, who was three years older than Captain Marion, attained his goal. "If he can do it, I can do it!" decided Captain Marion. Although he was married and had a family to support, he decided to change jobs. After two years of training, which he began at age 27, he succeeded in becoming

a pilot. Such availability of opportunity is one of the good aspects of American society. His very first instructor, incidentally, was that friend from the factory. “I was very lucky to know him,” Captain Marion says, “because otherwise I would never have even thought of flying.”

The gentle pilot became a flight captain at forty-two, in 1979. Now he is a veteran. One of the crew members remarked that Captain Marion always landed the plane very smoothly, even on snowy days, when landing is especially difficult. He also tried to keep his flights as smooth as possible. “Of course, I try,” replied the captain. “That’s my job. But just being able to ensure a smooth flight doesn’t

necessarily make a good captain.”

When pressed as to what he felt the traits of a good captain to be, he responded: “Well, first there is technical ability. Then there is the ability to keep a large group of people working well together. Flying is teamwork, requiring the cooperation of many different people — the ground crew, the air controllers and the flight crew. The captain bears the final responsibility, but it is a shared responsibility. The job of the captain is to create an environment in which everyone can do his or her best.”

True leadership encourages teamwork. For example, some captains may think it is rude to check the work of the crew, and sometimes the crew may notice something is wrong but decide not to bother the captain with it — and, as a result, accidents have happened. Both attitudes are examples of the failure of true teamwork, of a lack of true unity between captain and crew.

When I praised Captain Marion’s flying skill, he replied: “Thank you, but I’ve done nothing special. Of course, I did my best, but I am an average guy and an ordinary pilot, nothing more.” This humility may be the secret to his ability to bring out the very best in his crew. A leader who entrusts things to others encourages independence and a spirit of initiative among them, and helps create a sense of teamwork and joint responsibility that leads to the goal of a safe landing for all.

Genuine leadership is neither based on arbitrary judgments nor does it give way easily to compromise or cave in to pressure. Leadership that encourages everyone to work together toward a shared objective, each in their best capacity, with the leader working right alongside them, gives rise to real harmony. Under such leadership, the force released is not simply the sum of the abilities of all involved; there is an exponential effect. Instead of $5 + 5 + 5 = 15$, we get $5 \times 5 \times 5 = 125$!

When we took off from Indianapolis, the sky was beginning to brighten, and under the expert piloting of Captain Marion, we arrived safely in New York.

I still wear the baseball hat that the captain gave me. I feel as if we are flying the skies together. ☸



James A. Sugar/Corbis

A ground controller signals the pilot to stop by crossing his two batons. Though the captain bears final responsibility, flying requires teamwork from the ground crew, the air controllers and the flight crew.

continued from page 9

significant points so that I could grasp their meaning with my life. She was very warm and encouraging and shared her own struggles. I was struck when she asked me why I doubted the power of the Gohonzon. A deeper understanding of my nature came to me.

For the first time, I saw that it was because of my own arrogance and foolishness that I had delayed the surgery I needed years ago. I saw my life repeating that of my mother. She had been beset with financial and health problems and I thought if I simply relied on my practice and myself, I wouldn't have to face the same karma. However, Buddhism teaches common sense. I was treating my practice as if the Gohonzon would bestow my wishes like magic. I saw how frustrated I had become when after so many years, I was still struggling with the same issues; all the while I was compromising my practice.

I knew I had to deepen my faith if I was to change my karma. It was hard to accept that I was experiencing the effects of causes I had made, but I felt immeasurably better knowing I could turn my

situation around. I made a determination to really see myself as a Buddha and respect my life.

Once I determined not to be defeated, things started to change. I practiced steadily and studied the *World Tribune*, *Living Buddhism* and President Ikeda's guidance. I read and reread the passage from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* quoted above; I was determined to show actual proof.

My life is different now. I have compassion for people — something I lacked before. I cherish those who love me, especially my mother. She was there for me throughout my struggles and I have a new appreciation for her. Most importantly, I understand how important it is to use my practice first to challenge my problems head-on.

I hope that I can positively affect others with my new outlook. I am the lion king that President Ikeda so often talks about. I can say that I am enjoying my struggles and have awakened to my true self. Best of all, my health is in order. I will keep chanting and showing actual proof of the validity of this practice with my life. ☸

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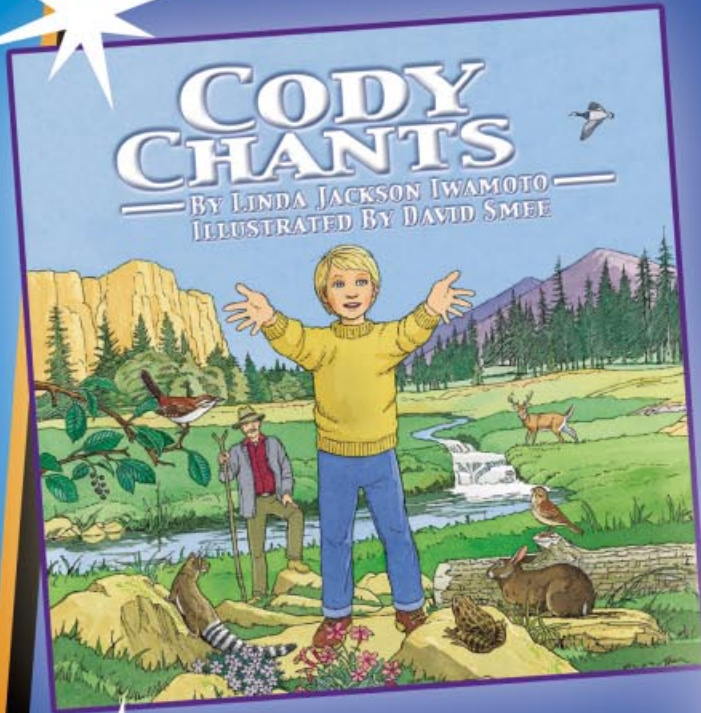
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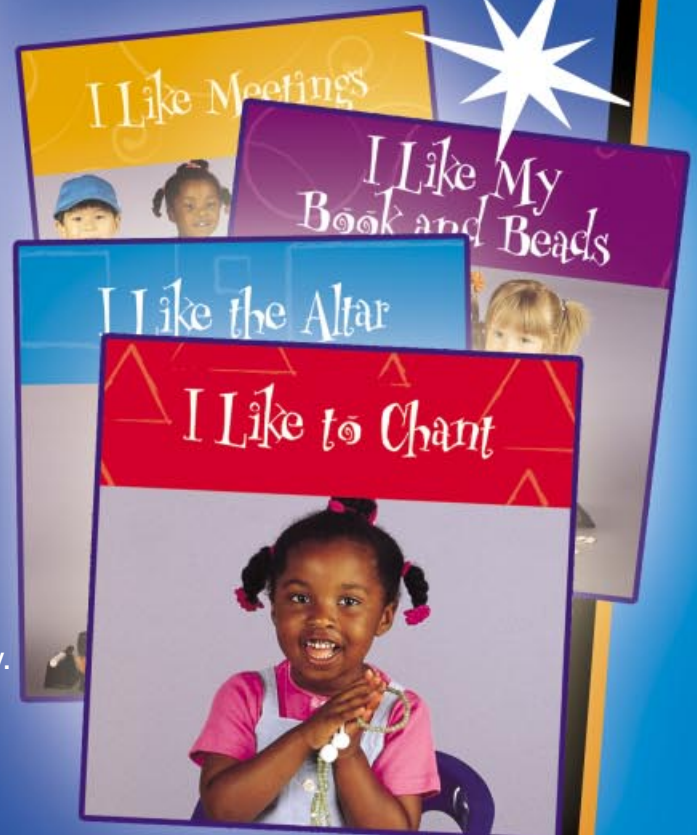
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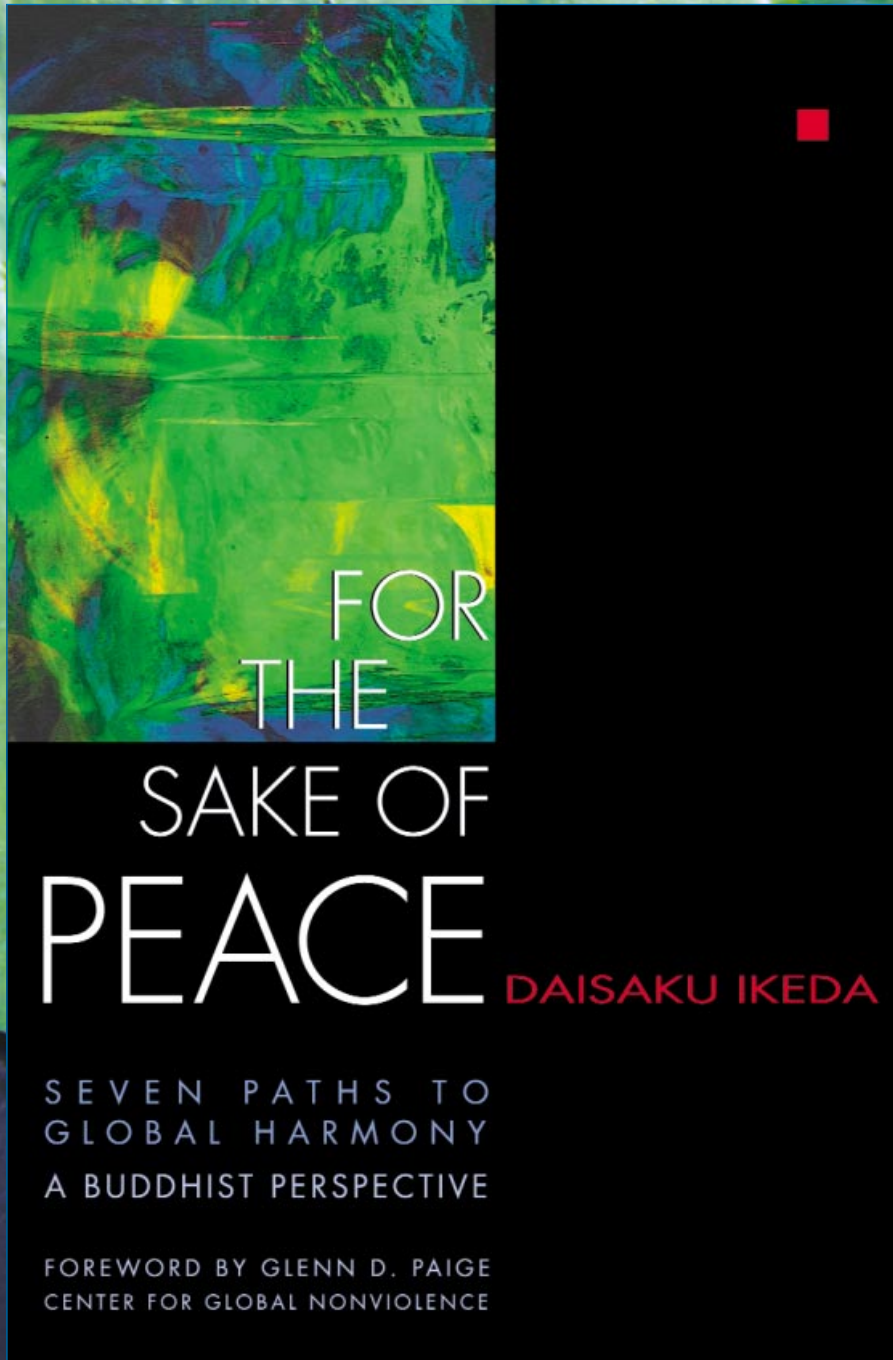
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