

The Human Revolution: A prerequisite for lasting peace*

Abstract

The spiritual basis for the peace efforts of the Soka Gakkai International is Mahayana Buddhism. This form of Buddhism urges its adherents to be concerned with the welfare of others. Through the youth movement of the Soka Gakkai International a number of activities have been carried out to encourage world peace.

Since international peace involves all peoples and all religions, efforts are being made to work with all those truly interested in world peace. To guarantee that the concern for peace is grounded in strong personal conviction, the Soka universities, in both Japan and the United States, have a strong focus on the issue of peace. They promote the premise that peace starts in the hearts of individuals, but can spread to encompass all of humanity.

Question 1: *What are the connections, or what is the relationship, between inner and outer peace?*

As the UNESCO constitution declares, war begins within the "minds of men." Truly, war originates in the destruction of humanity's inner world. External destruction and internal destruction are inseparably interrelated, acting in turn as cause and effect, not in the case of war alone, but also with regard to the many serious problems we face today – among

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them the destruction of our natural environment and the destruction of local cultures under the colonial policies of earlier periods. The mutual relationship between inner and outer world is easily grasped once we take a close look at issues such as these.

There are at least two courses through which changes in individual human beings and in society as a whole are brought about. One is to produce changes in consciousness through changes in the structure of society. This approach seeks to improve the human condition and achieve progress through reform of systems, policies, and the external environment. The other course of change is to effect social change through the transformation of the individual. This approach seeks to transform society and the external environment through an internal transformation.

In our world today, the essential nature of humanity itself is being subjected to great tests and is in danger of being lost entirely. Among the many crises that wrack the modern world, one of the most ominous is the arsenal of nuclear weapons that hangs over our heads, threatening the extinction of humankind. It is my firm and fundamental conviction that the only way to overcome this critical situation is to call forth and align ourselves with the power that resides inside each of us. In that sense, I regard our age as one which is moving from a period of revolution of the external environment toward one of human revolution.

Winner of the Nobel peace prize, Dr. Linus Pauling, with whom I have had the good fortune to meet and discuss these things, remarked in his book *No More War!*: "I believe that there is a greater power in the world than the evil power of military force, of nuclear bombs – there is the power of good, of morality, of humanitarianism. I believe in the power of the human spirit." Moving back in time just a bit, we can point to Mahatma Gandhi, who led India in its struggle for independence, as an advocate and practitioner of spiritual over physical force. His teaching of nonviolent passive resistance has been passed on in history as a triumph of the power of the spirit.

Buddhism delves even further into the human spirit, plunging into the great ocean of life itself. It reveals a method of practice that begins with the transformation of one's own life and leads from there to the transformation of other individuals, society, and all humankind. In Buddhism, the relation between the objective and subjective realms is described as follows: "Environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body there can be no shadow. Similarly, without life, environment cannot exist..." ("On Omens," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 4, Tokyo, 1986, p.146). In other words, just as our shadow is cast on the ground in a form matching that of our body, all of human society is a reflection of humanity's inner life. Without a transformation of humanity, there can be no transformation of our social

environment. This is the conclusion that Buddhism draws from its profound consideration of life and the universe.

It would be no exaggeration to say that though up until now the human race has cultivated the external world, it has allowed the barbarian within to rampage unchecked. Though systems of ethics and morals have been developed to control human emotions and desires, they have proven powerless against the forces that reside in the subconscious depths of the human heart. The only way to truly and fully overcome the great difficulties that humanity faces is to root out the many impurities and defilements that arise from those depths, and to activate within the hearts and minds of us all a pure and strong compassion and wisdom. There can be, in other words, no external peace without internal peace, and in fact external peace only becomes possible when internal peace is firmly established.

In order to eradicate the structural violence that can be found all over the world now, we must weave a protective net: for its vertical threads we will call up the spiritual power that arises from the depths of the life inside each of us; for its horizontal threads we will stretch layer after layer and dimension after dimension of the linked hearts of all citizens of the world. Our net will be a spiritual antiwar, antinuclear zone that extends over the entire globe, leaving no part unprotected. I believe the marshalling of that sort of spiritual power is the true force that will bring an end to war.

Question 2: Often in the West, Buddhism has been interpreted as self-serving or elitist rather than socially responsible. How would you respond to this?

Historically speaking, we can't deny that Buddhism has been characterized by aspects of elitism and self-concern. But in evaluating this particular criticism of Buddhism we must also look to the understanding of Buddhism on which it is based. It took a long time for the West to manifest an interest in Buddhism and begin to study it seriously. The seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal, in his *Pensées*, compared the religions of the world to Christianity, discussing in the process Judaism, Islam, "Chinese religion," and the religions of ancient Rome and Egypt. He did not see fit to mention Buddhism. Those books that did discuss Buddhism focused primarily on Theravada, or Hinayana, Buddhism, the "lesser vehicle" of the Buddhist teachings. A full understanding of Mahayana, or the "great vehicle" of Buddhism, was lacking. Even in this century, most European exponents of Buddhism presented it in a way that would certainly give the impression cited in your question, of a self-serving, elitist religion lacking in social responsibility. The great philosopher Henri Bergson, in his *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (English translation, 1935), went so far as to claim that Buddhism taught the extinction of the will to live.

In one of the volumes of his series *The Great Philosophers*, published in English in the early 1960s, the German existentialist philosopher, Karl Jaspers, discusses the Buddha and Buddhism at length. Toward the conclusion of his discussion, he praises the religion, saying that "Buddhism is the one world religion that has known no violence, no persecution of heretics, no inquisitions, no witch hunts, no crusades. True to its origin, Buddhism has never known a cleavage between philosophy and theology, between free reason and religious authority." But he returns to the standard Western view in the end: "Buddha is the embodiment of a humanity which recognized no obligation toward the world, but which in the world departs from the world."

Thus goes the depiction of Buddhism in relatively well-known writings of the West, where the emphasis is on the Buddha's abandonment of the world and his long practice in meditation, or on the world view of Buddhism as described in many Buddhist texts. With these as the bases for understanding Buddhism, it is perhaps natural to conclude that Buddhism is an elitist, self-centered religion which lacks a sense of social mission or responsibility. But if we examine the teachings of Buddhism more closely we will soon see that there are many differences of emphasis and even discrepancies among them. The religion has evolved and developed from country to country and age to age. Theravada Buddhism certainly places great importance on observing precepts. The way of Theravada practice – abandoning the lay life and devoting oneself to religious practice in order to obtain enlightenment – strongly suggests a search for personal spiritual salvation. By way of contrast, Mahayana Buddhism preaches the bodhisattva precepts. While the Theravada precepts are a list of specific prohibitions, the bodhisattva, or Mahayana, precepts consist, for the most part, in positive inculcations to devote oneself to the benefit of others.

One of the greatest differences between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism is that Mahayana Buddhism is committed to the salvation of the masses. Within Mahayana Buddhism itself, the Lotus Sutra stands out among all other teachings. It teaches that Buddha is not an existence separate from humanity, but rather one which dwells within the life force of "all sentient beings" – that is, all humanity. Many Buddhist scriptures teach that the world of human society that we live in is a place filled with suffering, and that a world of salvation – a Buddha land – exists in another place, separate from our world. But the Lotus Sutra clearly states that the Buddha exists here and now, within human society, inviting and leading us to happiness and fulfillment.

Nichiren Daishonin, a sage of thirteenth-century Japan, taught that the Lotus Sutra was the very epitome of Shakyamuni's teachings. He also taught the fundamental dignity of life and the path to realizing peace for all humankind. In one of his major works, "*Rissho Ankoku Ron*" (On

Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism), he insists: "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 2, Tokyo, 1981, p.43). Nichiren Daishonin strongly urged a practice to eliminate war and the various ills that beset human society. His teachings are the polar opposite of those you refer to in your question. The true spirit of Buddhism is not in the least self-centered; rather Buddhism teaches tapping the source of life within ourselves and then directing that energy and illumination toward society at large.

Question 3: How can the ordinary concerned citizen – say, a shopkeeper, or office, or factory worker – help in the promotion of world peace?

I believe that in every age it is ordinary people who are the main builders of peace. I also believe that it is very important – indeed, absolutely crucial – that the peace movement reach beyond the bounds of movement and government leaders, scholars, and popular cultural figures and spread to the ordinary people in a form that allows them to participate within the context of their daily lives. When war arises, after all, it has always been the nameless common people, the ordinary citizens, who are its most numerous victims; so they also must take responsibility for this task.

But most people are alienated and far removed from large government organizations and associations, both domestic and international. They are afflicted with a feeling of their own helplessness. What sort of peace movement will make them want to participate and feel as if their participation counts? The Soka Gakkai has confronted this issue head-on.

First, members devote their concentrated energies to achieving their own personal revolution. With this human revolution as their primary goal, the members engage in stimulating dialogue with others in order to awaken an understanding of the sanctity of life.

In 1972, I suggested the initiation of a youth movement to defend the sanctity of life, and its dignity. All peoples of the world have the right to life; each person possesses it by virtue of his/her humanity, and it is inviolable. Young people responded with joy and energy to my suggestion. First, a campaign to collect signatures for petitions seeking the abolition of nuclear weapons and an end to war was carried out across Japan. Ten million signatures were collected; ten million people announced their wish for peace and a nuclear-free world. In 1975, I passed these petitions to Kurt Waldheim, then secretary-general of the United Nations. Second, accounts of the war by some of those who survived it were gathered and published for the benefit of the young people who have never experienced war. Some eighty volumes of personal accounts have been published, containing the

testimony of approximately 3,400 people. The labors of these young people encouraged their mothers to pursue a similar path, and a series featuring women's war experiences is currently under way.

There are many other creative and intellectually stimulating programs and activities connected with peace going on at a local level, intimately connected with the round of daily life, including various kinds of exhibitions on the theme of peace, seminars, meetings, and film series.

Question 4: For the newly opened Soka University in California, you hope that it will be a "treasure house of capable people who will shoulder the establishment of world peace." Would you see these people as only those operating out of a Buddhist religious framework, or could they come from other religious frameworks?

Of course, the people I refer to need not be operating out of a Buddhist religious framework. The gates of Soka University in Japan are open to those of all religious faiths, and non-Buddhist students are presently enrolled. We also have many students from such countries as the Soviet Union and China, which have a different attitude toward religion in general. The Los Angeles campus of Soka University will observe the same policies. Our only consideration is a student's desire to excel and devote himself to his studies.

Of the problems that confront our world today, there are very few that can be solved by the efforts of a single nation. And none of them can be solved as long as we remain bound to narrow national interests. The issues of peace, the environment, natural resources, the survival of the human race, and the future of the planet – there are countless tasks facing us that transcend nations, transcend ideologies, and require the cooperation of us all.

On the occasion of the founding of Soka University, I offered three mottos to express the proper spirit of study that the university should cultivate: 1) Be the highest seat of learning for humanistic education, 2) Be the cradle for a new culture, and 3) Be the fortress for the peace of mankind. When the Los Angeles campus of Soka University was opened, I offered three additional mottos, with the intent of further expanding and opening our educational horizons to embrace all of human society: 1) Be a treasure house of capable people who will shoulder the establishment of world peace, 2) Be an energy source for the creation of Pan-Pacific civilization, and 3) Be an intelligence network linking East and West. We are also planning the construction on the Los Angeles campus of an Institute for the Study of Global Issues. Its function will be to serve as a channel for the exchange of research going on in various nations, universities, and in the United Nations system, for the purpose of contributing to the peace and stability of our planet in the twenty-first century.

I believe that the crucial task that will face those who engage in studies or research at the Los Angeles campus of Soka University, particularly after they leave the school to pursue their careers in a wide variety of fields, is to sustain the determination and the passion to realize the three mottos I cited earlier. Eventually, students from all parts of the world will seek to attend the Los Angeles campus of Soka University. There will also, no doubt, be an active exchange of professors and researchers with other institutions. For those reasons, I believe a view of human capabilities from a social perspective, quite separate from individual religious conviction, will be absolutely necessary.

Question 5: What are the contributions toward world peace that you expect to be taken, or are being taken, by Soka University?

Soka University was founded in 1971. In comparison with your university, we are very young. The three mottos I mentioned earlier have guided the university since its founding. As indicated by the third motto, "Be the fortress for the peace of mankind," I founded Soka University with the wish that it become an international university, open to all humankind and transcending the barriers of nationality, race, and social system. My wish is being concretely realized, though perhaps on a small scale. We have to date signed exchange agreements with eleven other universities: Moscow S. V. Lomonosov State University, Beijing University, Fudan University, Wuhan University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Chulalongkorn and Thammasat Universities of Thailand, the University of Sofia in Bulgaria, the University of Arizona, Lunds University in Sweden, and the Université de Paris V.

In addition to the extensive exchange programs with the universities mentioned above, the presidents, professors, and other staff members of many other universities have visited our campus for guest lectures or other exchanges, among them representatives of the University of Sydney, the University of Chicago, Harvard University, the University of Washington, the United Nations University, Cambridge and Oxford Universities, the University of Bonn, Peru's National University of San Marcos, and the University of Ghana. The Soka University European Language Training Center has been established in the French city of Verrieres-le Buisson, and in February of this year the Los Angeles campus of Soka University was opened. We hope through this international exchange to contribute in every way possible to world peace.

Soka University also includes a Peace Research Institute, where investigation of the fundamentals of and practical strategies for achieving peace is carried out. The institute organizes international seminars on peace-related topics and promotes exchange among domestic and international organizations and individuals.

In the sixteen years since the university's founding, our achievements are a modest few, but it is my firm belief that international exchange on the academic level will without doubt contribute to the formation of a rising tide for world peace in the next generation. We are planning to devote further efforts to ensuring that this dream is realized.

Question 6: If religion is officially separate from the state as in Canada and Japan, how best can a religious group influence the actions of politicians and diplomats and civil servants?

Separation of state and church is, of course, a fundamental principle of the modern nation-state. In the case of democracies, freedom of religion is another inviolable principle. In a democracy, naturally, the government is forbidden to extend its arm to control the individual's inner world, his thoughts and beliefs. It goes without saying that religious organizations, too, are forbidden to employ political power to force the nation's citizens to subscribe to certain religious beliefs. These principles have evolved in the course of human history through a long and sometimes painful process that has claimed precious victims, and they call for our highest regard and respect.

At the same time, political leaders, diplomats, and civil servants are also individuals with their own rights to freedom of belief, and as such they are free to join whichever religious organizations they choose.

Working within the framework described above, the first task of religious organizations is to spread their beliefs among the people and to educate and cultivate their followers based on those beliefs. Thus the influence they have as an organization on the government and society of their country is only of secondary importance. It is up to individuals, rather than the religious organizations to which they belong, to decide whether or not they wish to actively influence the politics of their nation.

Buddhism has at its core the belief in the dignity of life. It teaches that all individuals are to be respected equally by virtue of their humanity. Likewise, we must work to realize this religious belief in society, each of us from whatever position or role we occupy. Thus the political leader must work for the happiness of the people and the prosperity of society; the diplomat for good relations and friendly exchanges with other nations, and for world peace; the civil servant must put aside his own personal feelings and desires and serve the people of his community.

All societies are made up of individuals, and no matter how progressive our social systems might be, they are the products of human beings and it is human beings who make them run. Our goal is to create a great field of human development, where each person, regardless of rank or

station, can as an individual progress toward total human actualization. Our Buddhist movement is a pioneering of life itself, enriching the soil and expanding the fertile fields of humanity so that individuals, through the cultivation of their own characters, can make important contributions to their societies and their countries.

Question 7: Can you comment on the relationship among the many peace organizations? Are efforts being made to coordinate activities?

Religious faith is a phenomenon of a different order or level than the phenomena of government, economics, industry, and culture. It is of course possible – and absolutely necessary – for people of differing religious persuasions to cooperate on those secular levels in the pursuit of peace. In reality, peace can only be realized with the cooperation of the greatest number of people possible. In my personal effort to realize, and statements to urge, the abolition of nuclear weapons, disarmament, and a world free from war, I have continued to strive over the years to build and enlarge a worldwide human network of friendship and support precisely because I firmly believe that that is the only way to achieve a lasting peace.

Yet, as has been pointed out many times, until now the peace movement has been too closely tied to the promotional efforts of certain organizations, and considerations of those organizations' benefits have figured too greatly in the movement's efforts, so that the many voices calling for peace often seem to be working at cross purposes, at times even resulting in a pandemonium of sorts. Our coordination and cooperation with other organizations to achieve peace, then, cannot be unconditional. Careful consideration is necessary at each step of the way.

Working from that premise, the Soka Gakkai International's activities for peace, while based on the teachings of Buddhism, are being carried out from a global perspective. The same exhibition, "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World," that we have sponsored with your cooperation in your country, has travelled to seventeen cities in fourteen countries, with similar cooperation from many other organizations and institutions. We have also encouraged interaction for peace on the level of ordinary citizens, such as the antinuclear panel discussion between members of the American grass-roots antinuclear organization, Ground Zero, and members of an association of atomic bomb victims from Japan, held on the occasion of the United Nations special session on disarmament in 1982.

At present, the importance of the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as a force for peace in the United Nations is increasing, since these organizations are able to break through the hardening shells of national interest that are coming to enclose each nation. The Soka Gakkai International, as a United Nations NGO, firmly believes that the United Nations should be the hub of a network of peace initiatives that

transcend national and racial interests, and its support of the United Nations is based on that view.

Most important in achieving world peace is to build bridges of understanding and deepen channels of trust between people, transcending differences of nation, race, and ideology. Exchange between people at the level of ordinary citizens, in the fields of culture, learning, and education, is invaluable for strengthening the ties of trust between them. The Soka Gakkai International has long devoted its energies to creating ties between peoples on a broad scale. I personally believe that the surest road to world peace is to link together the hearts of individual and individual in a great ring of peace that circles the globe; and in an effort to realize this belief, I have visited forty countries and conducted discussions with leaders in various fields and with ordinary citizens as well.

Question 8: Must the research of a university's scientists work against the goals of world peace? Should there be a "research for peace" policy? If so, who should set the policy? What might it be?

The scalpel of science can neatly dissect the world of nature, showing us how it operates and helping us understand it, but when that scalpel is improperly used it can even further harm our already suffering planet Earth. This, as I think everyone will recognize, is the point to which science has progressed. At present, it is entirely impossible for scientists to divorce themselves completely from the effects their research has on society. The destruction of the natural environment and the invention of nuclear weapons are two events in particular that have called the social responsibility of scientists into question.

The connections among human beings, between humanity and nature, humanity and the universe, and between body and mind – all things in the world are tied together by invisible threads. Only when those connections are truly understood do we approach a grasp of the totality of life. But modern civilization has turned its back on that sort of total wisdom and has instead pursued knowledge by dividing the whole into smaller and smaller parts, in the process losing sight of the whole. What is needed now is a return in the direction of the whole. We must ask, "What link does this knowledge and learning have to me, and what meaning does it have?" Only when the knowledge of the parts is supported by the wisdom of the whole can it avoid the dangerous pitfalls of blindness.

The fate of the earth is far too weighty to be carried by a single person. I believe therefore that each scientist must cultivate an awareness of himself as a member of a sort of "medical team" pledged to preserve peace on earth. There are already many scientists who, out of a sense of duty or of their social responsibility as scientists, have devoted themselves to

for peace. Albert Einstein comes easily to mind, as do the Japanese physicist Yukawa Hideki and Dr. Anatol Rapoport of Canada.

Question 9: You are quoted as saying, "Unless we solve this basic question of whether life is eternal or whether it ends with death, then neither peace nor happiness in this world can be achieved." Many peace workers find the question of eternal life irrelevant to the preservation of life here and now. Would we not exclude many effective workers from our global concern if we insist on the dimension of faith?

I have not the least desire or intent to force the Buddhist view of human life on anyone else. With that disclaimer, let me clarify my thoughts on this subject. The reason I place such great importance on the question of whether life is eternal must be seen against the backdrop of the Buddhist teachings that are my own personal faith. Buddhism teaches that life extends through three existences, those of past, present, and future. On the basis of life as it permeates the three existences, the law of karma – that is, the law of cause and effect working in the depths of one's life – is explained.

If our life is limited to the single existence of the present, or in other words, if we return to nothingness after death, all morality and ethics lose their meaning in the resulting void that opens up beneath us, and the very concept of responsibility loses its anchor. If we are no more than froth on the waves of the sea of life, coming into being and lapsing away by happenstance, there is no reason why we should not live our lives exactly as we please, fulfilling our every desire; nor would there be any basis, for example, for condemning the practice of suicide. The fact that modern society has not been able to avoid a fundamental vulgarization is an unavoidable result of the secular rationalism that is its fundamental ideology. The ultimate outcome of this ideology is the treatment of life itself as a mere "thing", and that trend can in fact be seen in the newest developments in the life sciences.

A nihilist, a person who believes that all is over when he dies, must somehow come to grips with that fundamental insecurity at the root of his existence. In order to divert himself from that insecurity he feeds the flames of his desires. I am certainly not the only one who can see in this phenomenon the source of the cycle of consumption that supports modern material civilization, and that has at the same time created a spiritual vacuum at our civilization's centre.

Dostoevski gave words to the following effect to his character Ivan Karamazov, the rational atheist: "When eternal life is denied, human love withers and the life force necessary to go on living disappears. Not only that, but nothing is any longer immoral and all is permissible – even cannibalism. Evil acts in one's own interest become the most rational, the most noble deeds."

A true view of human life lifts us from the morass of nihilism, and is crucial in providing for each of us a purpose and meaning in life. Each of us must come to understand the law of karma, and discipline ourselves accordingly. When we understand karma, we will realize that, in our relations with others, violence not only harms others' lives but also carves a deep and gravely negative force into the core of our own.

The movement that we advocate for a human revolution does not stop at a change of personality, but extends to a change in the most basic attitudes and perceptions about the nature of life itself, it is a change of the entire human being. I know and believe as the firmest article of faith that the human revolution of a single person can change the fate of a nation, our world, and all humanity.

