

**EXCERPTS**  
**SGI President Ikeda On the Diversity Challenge**

Why was Shakyamuni able to employ language with such freedom and to such effect? What made him such a peerless master of dialogue? At essence, it was the embracing expansiveness of his enlightened state, utterly free of all dogma, prejudice and attachment. The following words, attributed to him, are illustrative: “I perceived a single, invisible arrow piercing the hearts of the people.” This “arrow” could be termed the arrow of a discriminatory consciousness, an unreasoning emphasis on difference. The India of his time was in a period of transition and upheaval, in which the horrors of conflict and war were an ever-present reality. To Shakyamuni’s penetrating gaze, it was clear that the underlying cause of this conflict was attachment to differences such as those of ethnicity and nationality.

—Harvard University on Sept. 24, 1993: “Mahayana Buddhism and 21st Century Civilization”

**Ikeda:** Diversity is power. The united efforts of people with different backgrounds produce creativity, and unity creates flexible wisdom. A creative movement supported by diverse individuals captures the hearts of the people and generates great waves of sympathetic feeling. Therefore, nothing is nobler than freedom and nothing is greater than unity.

**Mandela:** Life is also diverse. This diversity can lead to contradictions. We must fight against these contradictions in life and in society. In this regard, the challenge I have now is very worthwhile.

**Ikeda:** I have the utmost respect for those fighting against the contradictions in society. Such courageous individuals can clearly overcome contradictions within their own lives as well.

— From a dialogue between SGI President Ikeda and Nelson Mandela in Tokyo on Oct. 31, 1990, Nov. 12, 1990, World Tribune

It should also be noted that dialogue is not limited to the kind of placid exchanges that might be likened to the wafting of a spring breeze. There are times when, to break the grip arrogance has on another, speech must be like the breath of fire. It was the occasional ferocity of their speech that earned Shakyamuni and Nagarjuna, whom we typically associate only with mildness, the sobriquet of “those who deny everything,” from the powers-that-be of their respective eras.

—Harvard University on Sept. 24, 1993: “Mahayana Buddhism and 21st Century Civilization”

Reverberating from such a relationship is the resonance of individual personalities associating and interacting in earnest and in harmony as complete human beings. The form of trust created in this way is precisely what has been called “virtue” since antiquity. It seems to me that this is where we must seek the underlying, fundamental cause for the rising misbehavior, crime and other problems we observe among modern youth: the lack of fully human interaction between individuals. We cannot expect our various treatments for the symptoms of this “disease” to work effectively at least until we clearly address this underlying need.

— 1994 Peace Proposal: “Light of the Global Spirit: A New Dawn in Human History,” April 1994 Seikyo Times

Indeed, the “invisible arrow” of evil to be overcome is not to be found in races and classes

Title: SGI President Ikeda on the Diversity Challenge  
Subject: World Tribune 01/01/97 n.3120 p.10 WT970101p10  
Author: Daisaku Ikeda  
Keywords: Challenge Diversity Features Forums Guidance Ikeda Panels President Seminars Special

external to ourselves, but embedded in our own hearts. The conquest of our own prejudicial thinking, our own attachments to difference, is the guiding principle for open dialogue, the essential condition for the establishment of peace and universal respect for human rights. It was his own complete release from prejudice that enabled Shakyamuni to expound the Law with such freedom, adapting his style of teaching to the character and capacity of his interlocutor.

—*Harvard University on Sept. 24, 1993: "Mahayana Buddhism and 21st Century Civilization"*

Looking for compromises in the area of religious doctrine will probably end in failure. The first priority is that people learn to get along with one another as fellow human beings, for them to understand one another and form friendships. As people learn to exist harmoniously together, they start to see one another's good points. This opens the path to learning about one another. We have no choice but to begin from here.

— *From "Conversations With Youth On Buddhism, Life and History" [1], May 1994 Seikyo Times*

The Lotus Sutra embodies a philosophy that most highly respects, fosters and harmonizes human diversity. The Mystic Law is the source that enables us to manifest our unique brilliance against a backdrop of mutual understanding and appreciation of one another's differences; to create a lush garden of "cherry, plum, peace and damson" blossoms.

— *At a gongyo meeting with representatives of the New York joint territories at the New York Culture Center, June 15, 1996*

The earth belongs equally to everyone. it revitalizes all human beings, transcending racial, ethnic and national distinctions, and supports the flourishing of culture. A vibrant wellspring of pure altruism, of compassion, surges forth from its soil. If everyone were to awaken to their missions as bodhisattvas of the Earth and take action based on it, there would not be the slightest doubt that we could build true world peace and human harmony.

— *From The New Human Revolution, vol. 1, p. 157*

A person with a closed heart is one who is shut up within a self-imposed shell of selfishness and complacency. This sad and pointless act of severing "self" and "other" bears the hallmark of "evil" as I have attempted to define it here. This deep-rooted tendency, which has persisted throughout human history, is manifested in a singular way in our time, perhaps a fateful feature of 20th-century civilization.

— *1993 Peace Proposal: "Toward a More Humane World in the Coming Century"*

One of the most important Buddhist concepts, dependent origination, holds that all beings and phenomena exist or occur in relation to other beings or phenomena. Everything is linked in an intricate web of causation and connection and nothing — whether in the realm of human affairs or of natural phenomena — can exist or occur solely of its own accord. In this view, a greater emphasis is placed on the interdependent relationships among individuals than on the individual in isolation.

— *At Harvard University on Sept. 26, 1991, "The Age of 'Soft Power' and Inner-motivated philosophy"*

There is no doubt that nationalism, ethnic identity, and other much used and abused slogans today have been perfect objects of this easy credibility and fanaticism. This is because concepts of "race" and "ethnicity" are in large part fictitious, and ethnic identifications have typically been artificially constructed by one means or another. This may sound rather extreme, but I believe the circumstances warrant candid words; in a world where ethnic and national identity have become the source of such brutal violence, a definitive revision of our understanding of these concepts is critical.

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The "greater self" is the key, I believe, to the realization of the tolerance that makes genuine dialogue possible. And tolerance can help us create a new epoch of coexistence, shining the light of hope into the dark shroud of fin-de-siècle pessimism.

— 1995 Peace Proposal: "Creating a Century Without War Through Human Solidarity"

*Buddhism describes  
the connective threads of  
"dependent origination."  
Nothing in this world exists alone;  
everything comes into being and continues  
in response to causes and conditions.  
Parent and child.  
Husband and wife.  
Friends. Races.  
Humanity and nature.  
This profound understanding  
of coexistence, of symbiosis—  
here is the source of resolution for  
the most pressing and fundamental issues  
that confront humankind  
in the chaotic last years of this century.*

*The Buddhist scriptures include  
the parable of "Two Bundles of Reeds,"  
aptly demonstrating this relation  
of dependent origination.  
Only by supporting each other  
can the two bundles stand straight—  
if one is removed, the other must fall.  
Because this exists, so does that;  
Because that exists, so does this.*

*. . . .  
First you must break the hard shell  
of the lesser self.  
This you must absolutely do.  
Then direct your lucid gaze  
toward your friends, fellow members.  
People can only live fully  
by helping others to live.*

— From "The Sun of Jiyu Over a New Land"